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(54) **POLYSULFIDE INTERCALATED LAYERED
DOUBLE HYDROXIDES FOR METAL
CAPTURE APPLICATIONS**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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20, 2014.

Polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxides and meth-
ods for their use in vapor and liquid-phase metal capture
applications are provided. The layered double hydroxides
comprise a plurality of positively charged host layers of
mixed metal hydroxides separated by interlayer spaces.
Polysulfide anions are intercalated in the interlayer spaces.

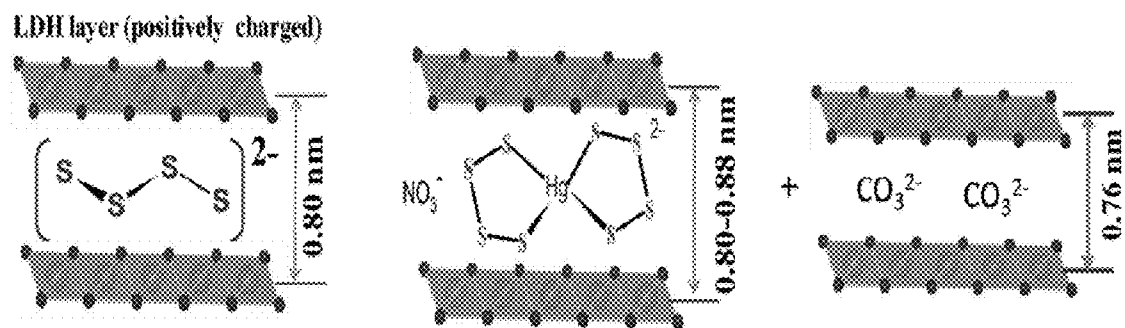


FIG. 1

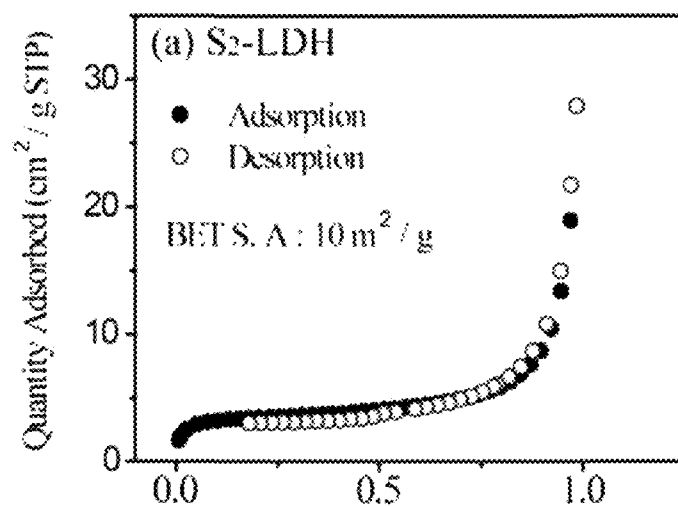


FIG. 2A

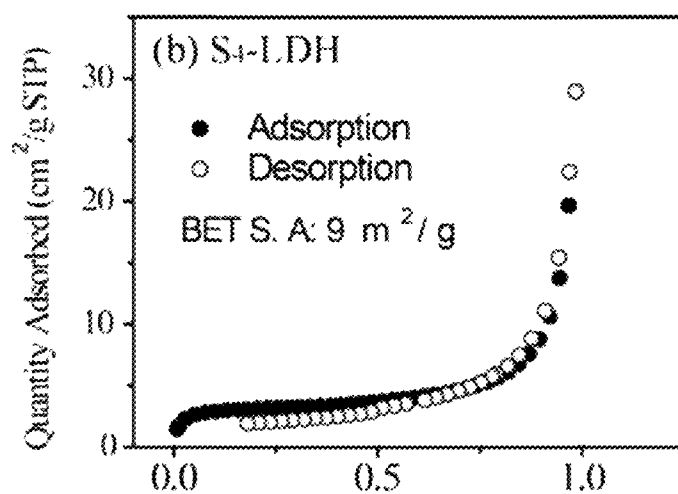


FIG. 2B

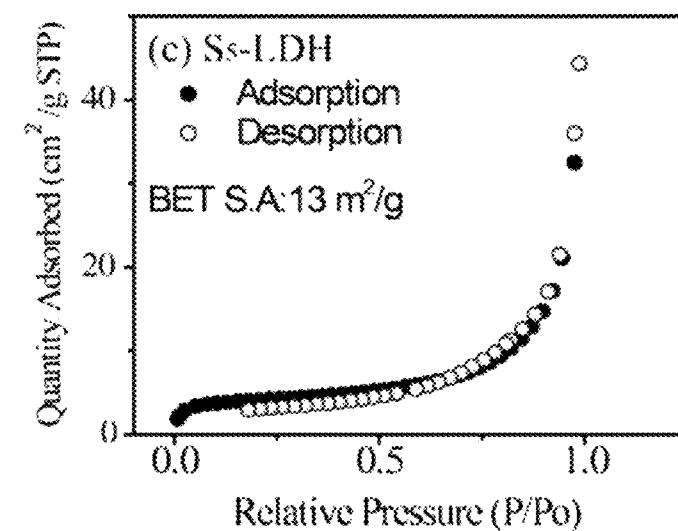


FIG. 2C

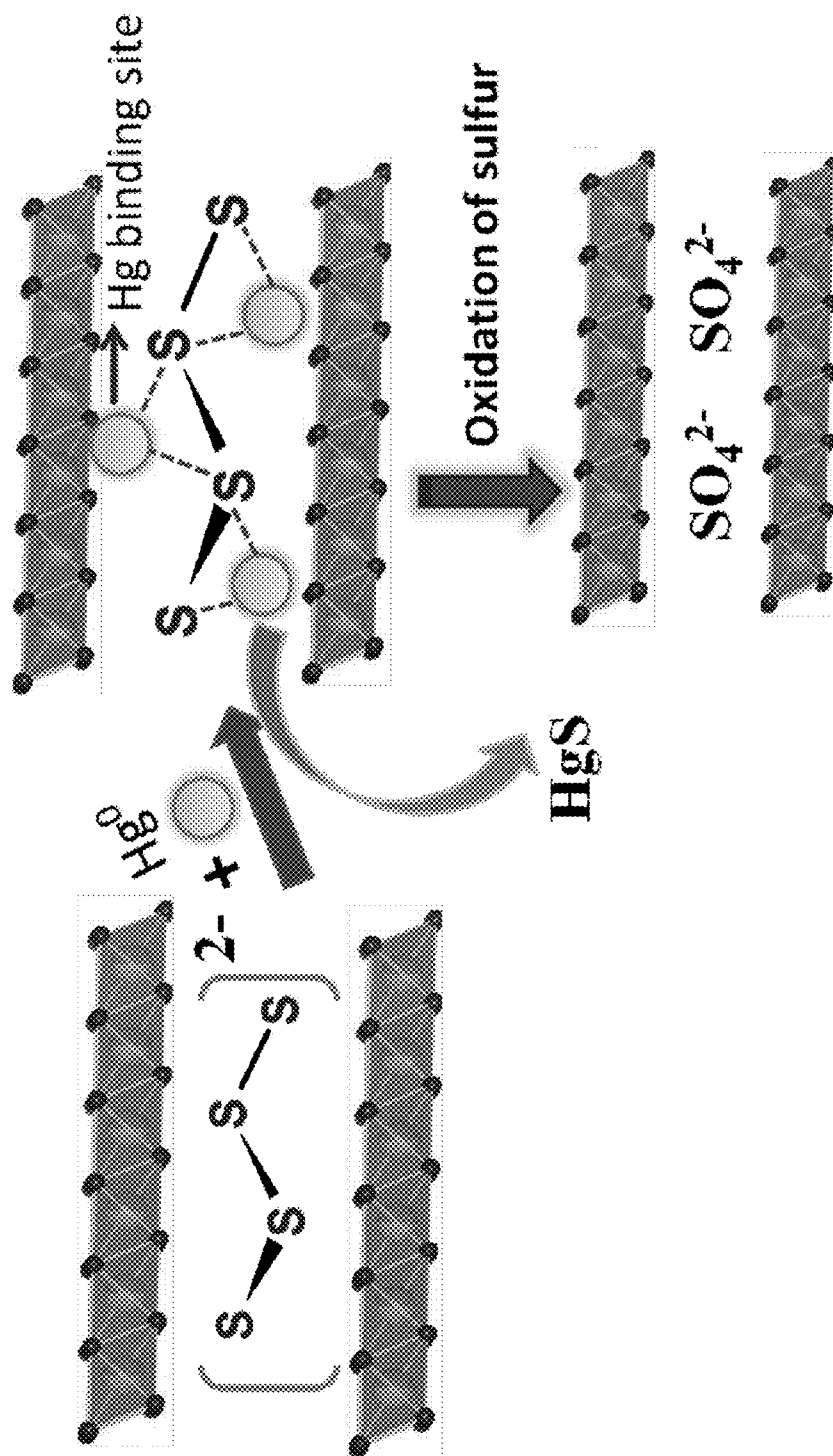


FIG. 3

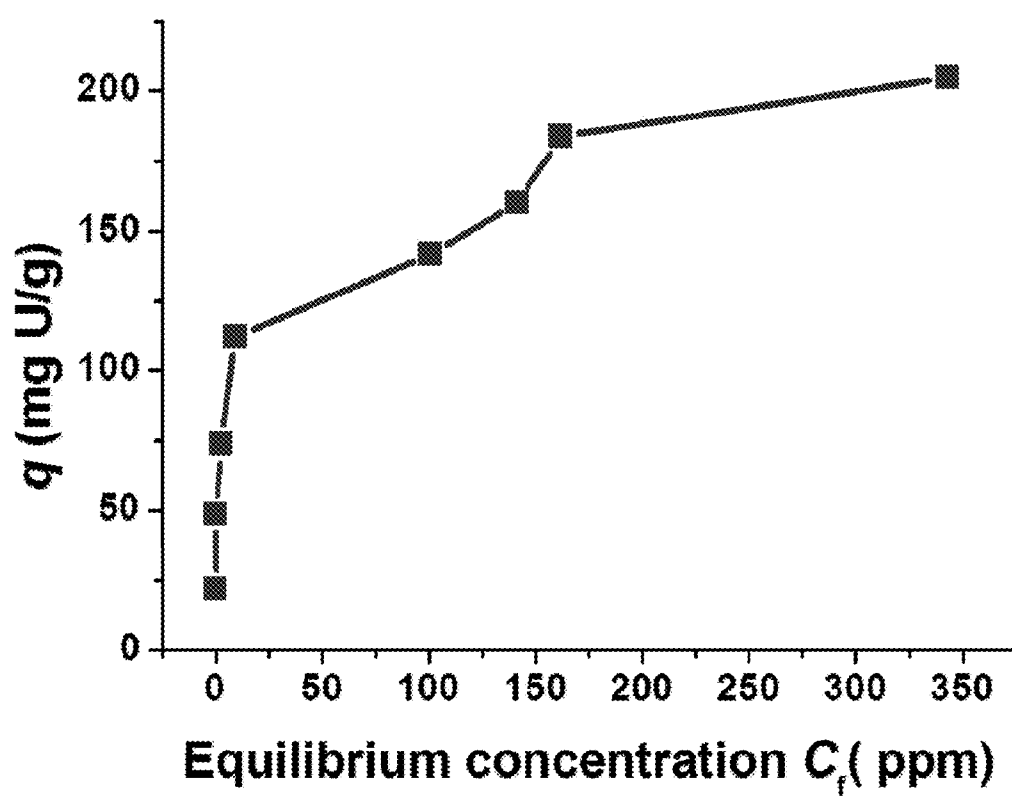


FIG. 4

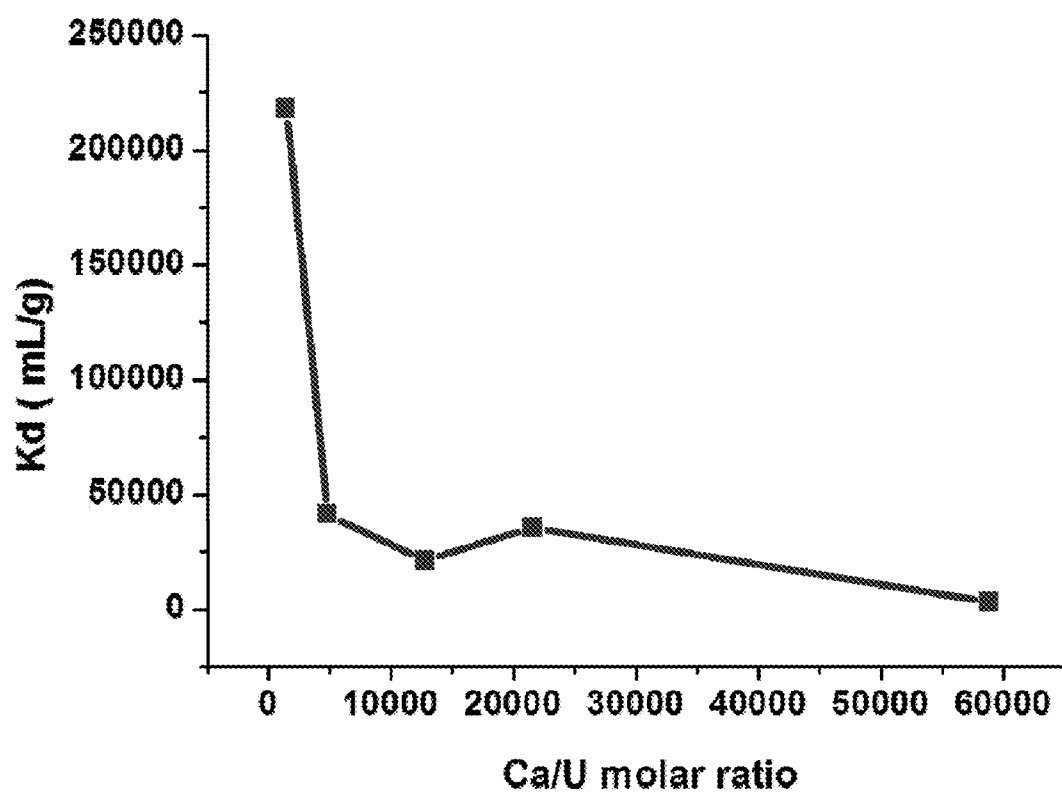


FIG. 5

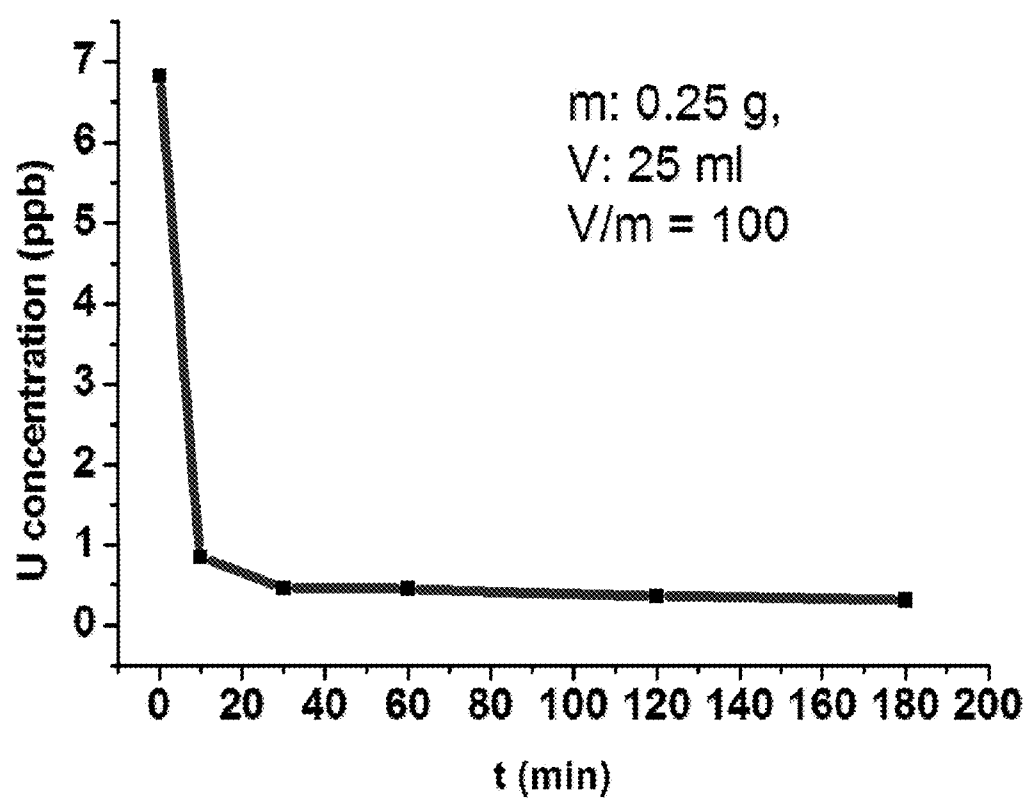


FIG. 6

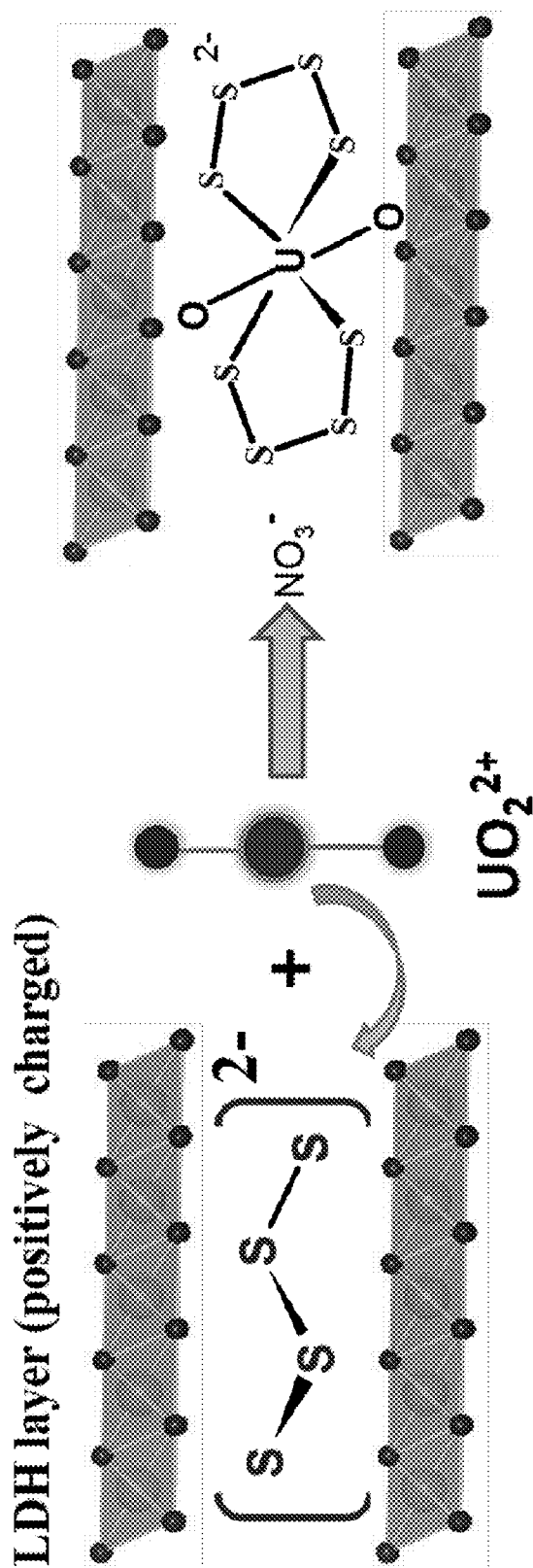


FIG. 7

POLYSULFIDE INTERCALATED LAYERED DOUBLE HYDROXIDES FOR METAL CAPTURE APPLICATIONS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] The present application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 62/000,623 that was filed on May 20, 2014, the entire contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference.

REFERENCE TO GOVERNMENT RIGHTS

[0002] This invention was made with government support under grant number DMR1104965 awarded by the National Science Foundation. The government has certain rights in the invention.

BACKGROUND

[0003] The contamination of water by heavy metals has been an increasingly important issue in separation science and environmental remediation. The prominent heavy metal pollutants, such as Hg^{2+} , Pb^{2+} and Cd^{2+} , in some natural water sources and industrial waste water constitute a threat for humans and other species.¹⁻³ Ion exchange and chemical precipitation are traditional methods for removing these heavy metals.^{4, 5} However, effective removal of heavy metal ions at low metal concentrations remains a great challenge.⁶ Precipitation methods with sulfide ions cannot reduce the concentrations of heavy metals below acceptable drinking levels.⁷ Thus, new and highly efficient adsorbents and methodologies need to be developed.

[0004] Selective metal adsorption on suitable substrate materials is considered one of the most economical methods of removal or recovery.⁸ Natural adsorbents such as clays^{9, 10} and zeolites¹¹ have been commonly employed because of their high surface area, hydrophilic character and low cost. These materials, however, suffer from low selectivity and weak affinity for heavy metal ions. Alternatively, sulfide-based materials¹²⁻¹⁶ seem to be effective for heavy metal remediation, as the high affinity of soft Lewis basic frameworks for the soft Lewis acids (e.g. Hg^{2+}) is innate to these materials. Mineral sulfides, such as FeS_2 , have the disadvantage of adsorbing metal ions only on their surface, due to their dense structures.¹⁷⁻¹⁹

[0005] Several functionalized layered materials have shown efficiency for heavy metal remediation.²⁰⁻²³ Synthetic layered sulfides, such as $\text{K}_{2x}\text{Mn}_x\text{Sn}_{3-x}\text{S}_6$ (KMS)²⁴⁻²⁹ or $\text{H}_{2x}\text{Mn}_x\text{Sn}_{3-x}\text{S}_6$,³⁰ with the ability for removing heavy metal ions have been reported. These materials operate under the soft-hard Lewis acid-base paradigm for the metal selectivity.

[0006] Elemental mercury (Hg^0) is a major toxic pollutant in the flue gas of coal combustion. The removal of mercury from this gaseous medium presents a great challenge due to the limitations in the conventional air-pollution control techniques such as fabric filtering (FF) and electrostatic precipitation (ESP).^{1a, 2a} These technologies rely on supporting materials such as activated carbon, activated alumina, and zeolites whose surface properties make them viable for mercury adsorption.^{3a, 4a} However, the poor chemical interaction between these materials and mercury reduces their adsorption capability, and the low loadings result in low Hg absorption capacity, which limits their application. Because of the high affinity of sulfur toward Hg^0 , sulfur-impregnated activated

carbon and zeolites have been studied for mercury adsorption,^{5a} and improvements in mercury capture efficiency have been achieved by functionalization with sulfide-containing groups,^{6a} however, the contamination of the combustion products (fly ash) by the activated carbon is undesirable.

[0007] Non-carbon materials functionalized with sulfur, for example Co-doped iron nanoparticles^{7a} and silica,^{8a} porous silica,^{9a} silica-titania nanocomposites,^{10a} especially sodium polysulfide-montmorillonites,^{11a} have recently demonstrated high mercury capture capacity.

[0008] The layered double hydroxides (LDHs), a known type of anionic clay, have positively-charged host layers and counter-anions in the interlayers. Thanks to their excellent exchangeability, LDHs can work as precursors to introduce other species to fabricate hybrid materials, which reveal important applications in adsorption,^{40, 41} catalysis,⁴²⁻⁴⁵ separation science,⁴⁶⁻⁴⁹ storage and triggered release of functional guests,⁵⁰⁻⁵³ optical materials,⁵⁴ etc. LDH materials have been studied for the removal of heavy metal ions, but in general they exhibit low selectivity.⁵⁵⁻⁵⁸ LDH intercalated with mercaptocarboxylic acid (with an S—H group) was reported to remove Hg^{2+} ,⁵⁹ but with moderate efficiency, possibly due to the steric hindrance of carboxylic groups.

[0009] Other studies have focused on the adsorption of anion pollutants. LDHs functionalized with anionic compounds can form new hybrid structures to produce particular properties. For example, intercalation of macrocyclic cyclodextrins into LDHs^{24a-27a} results in hydrophobic nanopockets with well-defined size and shape within the hydrophilic interlamellar space, allowing selective adsorption of neutral species such as I_2 ,^{28a} naphthalene,^{29a} anthracene,^{30a} ferrocene,^{31a} dodecylbenzene,^{27a} and phenol compounds.^{32a} Some sulfur-impregnated LDH composites were reported to remove mercury ions.^{33a}

[0010] The radioactive metal-containing waste generated from the increasing use of nuclear power presents a threat to the environment, natural water resources, and human health. Uranium salts that come from nuclear fuel fabrication, ore mining, manufacturing and processing are major reasons that nuclear energy may be very harmful to the environment.^{1b}

[0011] Nuclear power will continue to be an important source of the world's electrical power in the coming decades but this is dependent upon finding, harvesting, and managing the required amount of uranium. One of the most abundant sources of uranium is seawater at an estimated 4×10^{12} kg (at ~3-4 ppb).^{2b} The primary issue becomes harvesting this uranium in a cost effective manner with high yield. For the recovery of this uranium from the sea, various adsorbents including synthetic polymers, inorganic materials, and biopolymers have been tested. All these strategies approach the problem under the hypothesis that the uranyl ion is a hard Lewis acid species.^{3b} Uranium recovery is further hindered by the complex solution chemistry in seawater; uranium is present in multiple forms including $[\text{UO}_2(\text{CO}_3)_3]^{4-}$, $[\text{UO}_2(\text{OH})_3]^-$, $[\text{UO}_2(\text{CO}_3)_2]^{2-}$, $[\text{UO}_2]^{2+}$, $\text{UO}_2(\text{OH})^+$, and $\text{UO}_2(\text{OH})_2$, although the dominant form (~85%) is the $[\text{UO}_2(\text{CO}_3)_3]^{4-}$ complex. Furthermore, seawater has varying solution characteristics in terms of pH (7.5-8.5), temperature (2-40° C.), high salt concentration (0.6-0.7 M).

[0012] In recent years, a Japanese technology was developed to capture uranium from seawater using long mats of braided plastic fibers embedded with the uranium-adsorbent, amidoxime. These mats were placed underwater within the ocean and left for a period of time, after which they were

removed and washed with an acidic solution that captured the uranium for future refinement.^{1b} Currently, work is being done at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) to improve the adsorption capacity using fibrous sorbents with higher surface areas than those used by the Japanese. These studies show a >2× improvement in uranium adsorption capacity. Sorbents that show an even greater improvement in uranium adsorption capacity or uptake efficiency will be important to further reduce the cost of mining uranium from seawater.

[0013] For decreasing uranium concentrations, many technologies including ion exchange/absorption,^{4b-6b} adsorption,^{7b-9b} and chemical/biochemical reductive precipitation^{10b-13b} have been developed. Inorganic ion-exchangers such as clays and zeolites are generally of higher chemical and thermal stability, as well as more affordable, compared to the organic resins, so many inorganic exchangers used as adsorbents for heavy metals (e.g., UO_2^{2+}) have been investigated.^{14b,15b} But they have some drawbacks resulting from the slow exchange kinetics between the inorganic exchangers and large hydrated cations such as $[\text{Sr}(\text{H}_2\text{O})_x]^{2+}$ and $[\text{UO}_2(\text{H}_2\text{O})_x]^{2+}$. This limits their applicability for effective treatment of contaminated solutions.^{16b}

[0014] Uranium exists mainly as the uranyl cation UO_2^{2+} in aqueous solutions, which is a hard cation in the Lewis acid sense based on its hexavalent oxidation state and the presence of O atoms.^{1b} However, compounds with uranyl cations can form strong covalent bonds with soft S^{2-} groups.^{17b} The mineral sulfides (such as FeS_2) with soft ligands can act as uranyl scavengers, through reduction of the uranium(VI) and precipitation of the insoluble U_3O_8 .^{18b,19b} It has also been found that prepared layered sulfides KMS-1 ($\text{K}_{2-x}\text{Mn}_x\text{Sn}_{3-x}\text{S}_6$, $x=0.5-0.95$) showed good exchange/adsorption properties for UO_2^{2+} .^{20b}

SUMMARY

[0015] Polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxides and methods for their use in vapor and liquid-phase metal capture applications are provided. Also provided are methods for making the polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxides using anion exchange techniques.

[0016] One embodiment of a polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxide comprises: a layered double hydroxide comprising a plurality of positively charged host layers comprising mixed metal hydroxides, wherein the host layers are separated by interlayer spaces; and polysulfide anions intercalated in the interlayer spaces. The layered double hydroxide can be, for example, a magnesium-aluminum layered double hydroxide. In some embodiments, the polysulfide anions are anions having the formula $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$, where $x=2, 4$ or 5 .

[0017] One embodiment of a method of removing metal from a sample comprising the metal comprises the steps of: exposing a polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxide to the sample, wherein the metal reacts with the polysulfide anions to form compounds comprising metal-sulfur bonds in the interlayer spaces; and removing the polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxide and the compounds from the sample. The sample may be a vapor-phase or a liquid-phase sample. In some embodiments the metal comprises vaporized Hg. In other embodiments, the sample comprises metal ions, such as Hg ions, or metal-containing ions, such as uranyl cations, in solution.

[0018] One embodiment of a method of making a polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxide from a layered double hydroxide that comprises: a plurality of positively charged host layers comprising mixed metal hydroxides, wherein the host layers are separated by interlayer spaces; and charge-balancing anions within the interlayer spaces, comprises the step of exposing the layered double hydroxide to a solution comprising polysulfide anions, wherein the polysulfide anions undergo anion exchange with the charge-balancing anions in the interlayer spaces.

[0019] Other principal features and advantages of the invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art upon review of the following drawings, the detailed description, and the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0020] Illustrative embodiments of the invention will hereafter be described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

[0021] FIG. 1. A scheme for the binding of elemental mercury in the interlayer space of an S_4 -LDH.

[0022] FIG. 2A. The BET surface areas of S_2 -LDH.

[0023] FIG. 2B. The BET surface areas of S_4 -LDH.

[0024] FIG. 2C. The BET surface areas of S_5 -LDH.

[0025] FIG. 3. Efficient Hg vapor capture with polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxide. The intercalation of polysulfides into LDHs creates reactive S—S bonds which enable highly efficient Hg capture.

[0026] FIG. 4. Equilibrium data using S_4 -LDH to adsorb UO_2^{2+} .

[0027] FIG. 5. The variation of K_d^U (mL/g) with Ca/U molar ratios of 1500-60000.

[0028] FIG. 6. The kinetics of UO_2^{2+} adsorption using S_4 -LDH for water solutions with initial U concentration ~7 ppb, V:m=100 mL/g.

[0029] FIG. 7. Scheme 2. Arrangements of polysulfide $[\text{S}_4]^{2-}$ group in S_4 -LDH and (b) the binding with UO_2^{2+} in the interlayer accompanied by the entrance of anions such as NO_3^- .

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0030] Polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxides and methods for their use in vapor and liquid-phase metal capture applications are provided. Also provided are methods for making the polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxides using anion exchange techniques.

[0031] The polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxides comprise a layered double hydroxide (LDH) having polysulfide guest anions in their interlayer spaces. LDHs are anionic clays having a lamellar structure in which interlayer spaces are defined between positively charged host layers composed of mixed metal hydroxides. The intercalation of anions in the interlayer spaces compensate for the positive charge of the host layers. A magnesium-aluminum LDH (MgAl-LDH) is one in which a portion of the Mg atoms in the magnesium oxides that make up the host layers have been substituted with Al atoms. The use of MgAl-LDHs is advantageous in the present materials and method due to the high natural abundance of magnesium and aluminum, which makes these LDHs cost-effective as well as environmentally safe.

[0032] In the present LDH intercalates, the interlayer spaces are occupied by polysulfide anions. These anions are

composed of chains of two or more sulfur atoms and are represented by the formula $[S_x]^{2-}$, wherein x is an integer ≥ 1 . In some embodiments, x is equal to 2, 4 or 5. The corresponding intercalates are denoted S_x -LDH (e.g., S_2 -LDH, S_4 -LDH and S_5 -LDH).

[0033] The S_x -LDH intercalates can be made by carrying out an anion-exchange reaction between a polysulfide salt, such as an alkali metal polysulfide salt, and the interlayer ions of an existing LDH to provide $[S_x]^{2-}$ guest anions in the interlayer spaces. Such methods are illustrated in examples 1 and 2, below. Schematic diagrams of the structures of the resulting S_x -LDH intercalates are provided in Scheme 1 and FIG. 3.

[0034] The structure of the S_x -LDH intercalates renders the polysulfide guest anions easily accessible to adsorbing (e.g., chemisorbing or physisorbing) metal species. As a result, the intercalates find applications in metal capture. In metal capture applications, the polysulfide intercalated LDHs are exposed to a sample containing one or more metal species, such as metal ions, metal-containing ions, metal atoms or metal-containing molecules. The metal species are sorbed and react with the sulfur-sulfur (S—S) bonds in the polysulfide anion chains to form metal sulfide compounds having one or more metal-sulfur (M-S) bonds within the interlayer spaces. For metal species that are metal ions or atoms, these compounds can be represented by the formula MS_x , where M is the metal and x is an integer, the value of which depends on the particular polysulfide anions present in the LDH. By way of illustration only, in some embodiments x has a value in the range from 1 to 8. The S_x -LDH intercalates and the M-S bond-containing compounds can then be removed from the sample.

[0035] In the metal capture applications, the polysulfide intercalated LDHs can be loaded onto a porous support substrate to facilitate their introduction into, and removal from, vapor and liquid-phase samples.

[0036] In some embodiments of the metal capture applications, the polysulfide intercalated LDHs are used to capture mercury in vapor-phase samples, such as natural gas, hydrocarbon streams and flue gases. In these embodiments, the presence of the S—S bonds of the polysulfides in the interlayer space of the LDH structure provide a driving force for Hg capture via the formation of S—Hg—S bonds and, ultimately the formation of HgS. The polysulfide intercalated LDHs can have very high Hg vapor capture capacities. For example, some embodiments of the polysulfide intercalated LDHs have an Hg capture capacity of at least about 5×10^5 $\mu\text{g/g}$, as measured by inductively coupled plasma-atomic emission spectroscopy (ICP-AES). This includes embodiments having an Hg capture capacity of at least about 7×10^5 $\mu\text{g/g}$ and further includes embodiments having an Hg capture capacity of at least about 1×10^6 $\mu\text{g/g}$, as measured by ICP-AES. A description of ICP-AES is provided in the examples.

[0037] In other embodiments of the metal capture applications, the polysulfide intercalated LDHs are used to remove metal ions, such as heavy metal ions and/or transition metal ions, from aqueous or non-aqueous liquid-phase samples. In these applications, the presence of the S—S bonds of the polysulfides in the interlayer space of the LDH structure provide a driving force for metal ion capture via the formation of M-S bonds between the intercalated polysulfides and the metal ions in solution. Metal ions that form M-S compounds with the polysulfide sulfur anions include heavy metal ions and/or transition metal ions. For example, the polysulfide

intercalated LDHs can be used to remove Hg^{2+} , Ag^+ , Cu^{2+} , Cd^{2+} , Pb^{2+} , Zn^{2+} , Co^{2+} , Ni^{2+} , or combinations of two or more of these ions from a sample. The polysulfide intercalated LDHs can have very high metal ion absorptive capacities. For example, some embodiments of the polysulfide intercalated LDHs have a metal absorptive capacity of at least about 1×10^5 $\mu\text{g/g}$, as measured by ICP-AES. This includes embodiments having metal ion absorptive capacities of at least about 4×10^5 $\mu\text{g/g}$ and further includes embodiments having metal ion absorptive capacities of at least about 6×10^6 $\mu\text{g/g}$, as measured by ICP-AES. The resulting removal of metal ions can be extensive. For example, the amount of one or more ions—or the total amount of metal ions—in the sample may be reduced by at least 40%, at least 70%, at least 90% or at least 99%, based on weight.

[0038] Examples of liquid samples that can be remediated using the present LDH intercalates include, drinking water and waste water generated from a nuclear reactor, an industrial plant or from mining processes, such as ore leaching.

[0039] In still other embodiments of the metal capture applications, the polysulfide intercalated LDHs are used to remove uranium-containing ions, such as uranyl cations from aqueous or non-aqueous samples. In these applications, the presence of the S—S bonds of the polysulfides in the interlayer space of the LDH structure provide a driving force for metal ion capture via the formation of U—S bonds between the intercalated polysulfides and the uranium atoms in the uranium-containing ions in solution. The polysulfide intercalated LDHs can have very high uranium absorptive capacities. For example, some embodiments of the polysulfide intercalated LDHs have a metal absorptive capacity and can provide extensive removal of uranium-containing ions from a sample. For example, the amount of uranium-containing ions in the sample may be reduced by at least 40%, at least 70%, at least 90% or at least 99%, based on weight.

[0040] Examples of uranium-containing samples that can be remediated using the present LDH intercalates include, sea water (e.g., from an ocean or a sea), drinking water and waste water generated from a nuclear reactor.

Example 1

[0041] Herein, we report the intercalation of the polysulfides of K_2S_x [$x=2, 4$] into a NO_3^- type MgAl -LDH. When separating Cu^{2+} , Hg^{2+} and Ag^+ from complex mixtures of metals, these materials (referred to as S_x -LDH) showed excellent removal capacity (~ 686 mg/g for Hg^{2+}) and high selectivity (K_d for Hg^{2+} can achieve $\sim 10^7$ mL/g) toward heavy metals. This places them among the top materials known for heavy metal removal. More importantly, the ability of reducing heavy metal pollutants (Hg^{2+} and Ag^+) of any concentration (even very low ppm levels) down to ppb makes these intercalated polysulfides promising for environmental applications.

EXPERIMENTAL

[0042] Materials

[0043] The $\text{MgAl}-\text{CO}_3$ -LDH was prepared by the HMT (hexamethylenetetramine) hydrolysis method^{60,61} as we previously reported.⁶² The $\text{MgAl}-\text{NO}_3$ -LDH was prepared through $\text{NO}_3^-/\text{CO}_3^{2-}$ anion exchange reactions.⁶¹ The polysulfides of K_2S_x ($x=2, 4$) were prepared by the reaction of K and S in liquid ammonia as described previously.³⁷ The $[S_x]^{2-}$ anions were exchanged with NO_3^- to get S_x -LDH.

Typically, 0.2 g NO₃-LDH and 0.2 g K₂S_x (x=2 or 4) was first put into a 20 mL glass vial inside a glovebox. The vials were removed from the glovebox and 8 ml dispersed degassed deionized water was added. The obtained suspension was sealed and left for reaction at ambient temperature for 24 h. The resulting S_x-LDH solids were filtered, washed with deionized water and then acetone, and then finally air-dried.

[0044] Heavy Metal Uptake Experiments

[0045] The heavy metal uptake from aqueous solutions of various concentrations (10 and 20 ppm, 2.5 and 10 mM) was studied using a batch method. The solid sorbents were immersed in the solution of M(NO₃)_m (M=Co²⁺, Ni²⁺, Cu²⁺, Zn²⁺, Ag⁺, Pb²⁺, Cd²⁺, Hg²⁺) with intermittent shaking for 3 h, 6 h, 24 h and sometimes 3 days.

[0046] For distinguishing Hg²⁺ from Ag⁺ clearly, an experiment containing only Ag⁺ and Hg²⁺ in solution was carried out. A concentration of ~20 ppm for each ion (40 ppm for Ag⁺+Hg²⁺) mixed with small quantity of S_x-LDH (0.001 and 0.002 g) was used that was adequate to pick up one of the two ions but not both.

[0047] After mixing the solid sorbents with the solutions for a certain time, a filtration was performed and the concentrations of metal ions in the supernatant solution (separated by centrifugation) were determined using inductively coupled plasma-atomic emission spectroscopy (ICP-AES) and inductively coupled plasma-mass spectroscopy (ICP-MS) for extra low ion concentrations. The adsorption capacity was evaluated from the difference of metal concentrations in the mother and supernatant solutions.

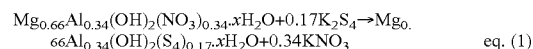
[0048] The distribution coefficient K_d used for determining the selectivity of S_x-LDH for heavy metals is given by the

(SEM) measurements were carried out using a Hitachi S-4800 microscope at 5.0 kV. The metal ion contents in solid samples were determined by inductively coupled plasma atomic emission spectroscopy (ICP-AES, Jarrel-ASH, ICAP-9000), and a 0.1 M HNO₃ solution was used to dissolve them. The metal ion concentrations in supernatant solution after the adsorption experiments were measured using the ICP-AES technique and, for extra low concentrations, inductively coupled plasma-mass spectroscopy (ICP-MS, NexION 300x) was used. C, H and N contents of the solid samples were determined using an Elementar Vario EL elemental analyzer. The chemical formulas of the samples were calculated from the results of ICP and CHN analyses.

[0051] Results and Discussion

[0052] Synthesis and Characterization of S_x-LDH Materials.

[0053] The synthesis of polysulfide containing LDH materials was accomplished via the ion-exchange reaction in eq. (1).



[0054] The exact molecular formulae of CO₃-LDH, NO₃-LDH, S₄-LDH and S₂-LDH (Table 1) were determined via ICP, CHN analysis and charge balance considerations. Compared with the NO₃-LDH precursor, it is clear that some adventitious CO₃²⁻ ions re-enter the structure, which is attributed to the very strong affinity of this ion for the LDH layers.⁶³ Based on the XRD data the small amount of CO₃²⁻ likely co-exists with [S_x]²⁻ in the interlayer space and does not form a separate phase.

TABLE 1

Chemical compositions of LDH samples with different interlayer anions.							
Samples	d _{basal} /nm	Chemical Formula	Wt %, Found (Calcd.)				
			Mg	Al	C	H	N
CO ₃ -LDH	0.76	Mg _{0.66} Al _{0.34} (OH) ₂ (CO ₃) _{0.17} •0.8H ₂ O	19.69 (19.55)	11.63 (11.55)	2.43 (2.57)	4.53 (4.50)	—
NO ₃ -LDH	0.89	Mg _{0.66} Al _{0.34} (OH) ₂ (NO ₃) _{0.32} (CO ₃) _{0.01} •0.6H ₂ O	18.94 (18.27)	11.28 (10.43)	0.18 (0.14)	3.59 (3.84)	4.62 (4.45)
S ₄ -LDH	0.81	Mg _{0.66} Al _{0.34} (OH) ₂ (S ₄) _{0.13} (NO ₃) _{0.01} (CO ₃) _{0.04} •0.8H ₂ O	16.72 (17.02)	10.26 (9.90)	0.49 (0.52)	3.84 (3.87)	0.11 (0.15)
S ₂ -LDH	0.80	Mg _{0.66} Al _{0.34} (OH) ₂ (S ₂) _{0.14} (NO ₃) _{0.01} (CO ₃) _{0.02} •0.8H ₂ O	17.25 (18.04)	10.31 (10.50)	0.29 (0.27)	3.97 (4.56)	0.15 (0.16)

equation $K_d = (V[(C_0 - C_f)/C_f])/m$, where C₀ and C_f are respectively the initial and local concentration of Mⁿ⁺ (ppm) after the contact, V is the volume (mL) of the testing solution, and m is the amount of the solid sorbent (g) used in the experiment.²⁴ Our experiments were performed with V:m ratios of 500-30000 mL/g at ambient temperature.

[0049] Characterization Techniques

[0050] The powder X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns were collected using a Phillips X'pert Pro MPD diffractometer with Cu-Kα radiation, at room temperature, with step size of 0.01670, scan time of 15 s per step, and 2θ ranging from 4.5 to 700. The generator setting was 40 kV and 40 mA. Fourier transformed infrared (FT-IR) spectra of the samples were recorded on a Nicolet-380 Fourier-Transform infrared spectrometer using the KBr pellet method. Raman spectra were taken on a microscopic confocal Raman spectrometer, using a 633 nm He—Ne laser. Scanning electron microscope

[0055] XRD patterns of the CO₃²⁻ and NO₃⁻-LDH precursors and the exchanged products exhibited diffraction peaks with sharp and symmetric features, indicating the high crystallinity of the samples. All compounds exhibit a series of strong basal (001) Bragg reflections characteristic of a layered phase and a high degree of orientation. The d values of 0.76 and 0.89 nm are characteristic of CO₃²⁻ and NO₃⁻-type LDHs. A series of strong (001) reflections at 0.81, 0.40 and 0.22 nm for the S₄-LDH sample indicate a layered phase with basal spacing (d_{basal}) of 0.81 nm. Since the thickness of the LDH layer is 0.48 nm,⁶⁴ the gallery height can be estimated at ~0.33 nm (=0.81-0.48). The small gallery height suggests a flat arrangement of the zig-zag polysulfide [S₄]²⁻ group in the interlayer, as shown in Scheme 1 of FIG. 1.

[0056] S₂-LDH has a slightly shorter d_{basal} of 0.80 nm, consistent with the smaller size of [S₂]²⁻. Additionally, considering the decomposition reaction of polysulfides such as

$[S_4]^{2-} \rightarrow S^{2-} + 3S_0$, the different basal spacings of S_2 -LDH and S_4 -LDH may be due to the different decomposed amount of S_8 that co-existed in the gallery. From the XRD patterns, it was apparent that the intercalation of the different anions shifts the position of the (001) reflections, but a peak at $d=0.15$ nm corresponding to the (110) plane in the 2D LDH sheets did not change. This indicates the stability of the brucite layers during the ion-exchange process, i.e. a topotactic ion-exchange, which is also supported by the SEM observation discussed later.

[0057] IR and Raman spectra verified the formation of the intercalated compounds and their successful ion-exchange. In the IR spectra, bands at 1354 and 780 cm^{-1} are the characteristic absorptions of CO_3 -LDH.⁶⁰ After the treatment of the CO_3 -LDH with $\text{NaNO}_3 + \text{HNO}_3$, the 1354 cm^{-1} band (CO_3^{2-}) disappears, and a strong band appears at 1384 cm^{-1} corresponding to NO_3^- absorption. When the $[S_4]^{2-}$ anions are intercalated, the NO_3^- absorption at 1384 cm^{-1} becomes weak or negligible, consistent with a nearly complete exchange. Generally, small and highly charged anions preferentially occupy the LDH interlayer space.^{39,63,65-67} Thus, the -2 charge of the polysulfide ion provides a strong driving force for the exchange over the singly charged nitrate. Bands at 681 and 445 cm^{-1} in NO_3 -LDH, respectively assigned to $\nu(\text{M}-\text{O})$ and $\delta(\text{O}-\text{M}-\text{O})$ vibrations^{68, 69}, shift to 663 and 447 cm^{-1} in S_4 -LDH, possibly due to the effect of the interlayer guest.

[0058] The S—S stretching vibrations occurring in the region of 477-486 cm^{-1} ⁷⁰ in the IR spectra may overlap with the strong $\text{Mg}(\text{Al})-\text{O}$ vibrations appearing in the same range. Raman spectra, however, give better evidence for S—S bonds. Bands at 228, 267, 434 and 484 cm^{-1} are consistent with the symmetric and asymmetric S—S vibrations of polysulfide anions.⁷⁰ After intercalation of $[S_x]^{2-}$, the main vibration bands remain but with small shifts, reflecting the interaction of $[S_x]^{2-}$ with the LDH host layer. For K_2S_2 and S_2 -LDH, there is only one peak at 455 cm^{-1} due to the only one S—S bond. The different vibration bands in S_2 -LDH and S_4 -LDH showed the different groups in the interlayer of the composites.

[0059] The SEM observations indicate the crystallites of NO_3 -LDH have a hexagonal prismatic shape, retaining the morphology of the CO_3 -LDH precursor.⁶⁰ After ion-exchange of NO_3^- with $[S_x]^{2-}$, the S_x -LDH crystallites fully maintained the hexagonal prismatic shape (FIG. 3), confirming topotactic insertion of the polysulfide anions.

[0060] Heavy Metal Ion Removal Using S_x -LDH.

[0061] The uptake of heavy metal ions by S_x -LDH from aqueous solutions of various concentrations was studied with the batch method ($V:m=500$ -30000 mL/g, contact exposure time of 3-72 h, room temperature). The affinity of S_x -LDH for the metal ions is reflected in the distribution coefficient K_d values. At first, adsorption experiments with individual solutions of the ions Co^{2+} , Ni^{2+} , Cu^{2+} , Zn^{2+} , Ag^+ , Pb^{2+} , Cd^{2+} and Hg^{2+} were performed. Subsequently, metal removal experiments using solutions containing all these ions simulta-

neously were carried out. We used three sets of metal ion concentrations: low values of 10 and 20 ppm for assessing the selectivity, and high values of 10 mM for assessing removal capacity. The $V:m$ values varied from 500 to 30000 mL/g, with a solution volume (V) of 10 and 30 ml and solid mass (m) from 0.002 g to 0.035 g.

[0062] Table 2 summarizes the adsorption results of individual ions by the S_4 -LDH. From this table, the general selectivity order for the eight ions is as follows: Ni^{2+} , $\text{Co}^{2+} < \text{Zn}^{2+}$, $\text{Cd}^{2+} < \text{Cu}^{2+}$, $\text{Pb}^{2+} < \text{Hg}^{2+}$, Ag^+ . The adsorption ability and selectivity toward $\text{Hg}^{2+}/\text{Ag}^+$ and $\text{Cu}^{2+}/\text{Pb}^{2+}$ is much higher than all other ions. After 3 h of contact time, the concentrations of Hg^{2+} , Ag^+ decreased from the starting value of ~10 ppm to ≤ 1 ppb, with nearly 100% removal achieved. At the same time, 75-80% removal was observed for Cu^{2+} and Pb^{2+} . The adsorption selectivity for Zn^{2+} and Cd^{2+} was not high. Below we will discuss experiments using mixtures of all these ions where a much higher selectivity is observed.

TABLE 2

Adsorption results of S_4 -LDH toward eight metal ions (10 ppm). ^a						
S_4 -LDH single	Initial solution		After 3 h adsorption		M^{n+}	
ion	C_0 (ppm)	pH	C_f (ppm)	pH	removal (%)	K_d (mL/g)
Co	9.775	5.14	8.943	5.42	8.5	80
Ni	9.714	5.20	9.208	5.37	5.2	47
Cu	10.097	4.68	2.661	5.60	73.6	2.4×10^3
Zn	8.877	4.92	6.543	5.37	26.3	305
Ag	10.234	4.40	0.001	5.70	100.0	8.8×10^6
Pb	8.464	4.74	1.867	5.58	77.9	3.0×10^3
Cd	9.903	4.97	6.771	5.19	31.6	396
Hg	7.802	2.78	0.0008	3.27	100.0	8.4×10^6

^aion concentration: ~10 ppm per ion.

V , 30 ml;

m (mass of solid sample), 0.035 g;

V/m ratio: 30/0.035 = 860.

Contact time: 3 h.

[0063] The removal results from the solutions containing all ions (e.g. "mixed ion state") are shown in Table 3. The concentration of each ion in the starting solution was ~10 ppm. Using equal amount of 0.035 g S_4 -LDH as in the single adsorption experiments, a selectivity order of Ni^{2+} , $\text{Co}^{2+} < \text{Zn}^{2+}$, $\text{Pb}^{2+} < \text{Cd}^{2+} < \text{Cu}^{2+}$, Ag^+ , Hg^{2+} was observed, generally in agreement with those seen in single adsorption experiments, except for the different order seen among Cu^{2+} , Pb^{2+} and Cd^{2+} . Nearly all of the ions gave increased K_d values (Table 2 and 3): 4000 fold ($=9.5 \times 10^6/2.4 \times 10^3$) for Cu^{2+} , 4260 ($=1.3 \times 10^6/305$) fold for Zn^{2+} , 533 fold ($=1.6 \times 10^6/3.0 \times 10^3$) for Pb^{2+} , and the biggest augmentation of 17420 ($=6.9 \times 10^6/396$) fold was observed for Cd^{2+} . We speculate that a cooperative interaction of various coexisting cations may be responsible for the increase. Another reason may be the acidity of the mixed solution (pH is ~3) resulting from the dissolution of all these salts. The acidity may affect the hydration of some cations to various degrees, which may modulate the binding driving force with the $[S_x]^{2-}$ group.

TABLE 3

Adsorptive selectivity toward mixed ions (10 ppm per ion) using different amounts of S ₄ -LDH. ^a								
S ₄ -LDH Mixed ions	Co	Ni	Cu	Zn	Ag	Pb	Cd	Hg
0.002 g C ₀ (ppm)	10.62	11.01	11.08	10.57	11.45	11.34	8.01	9.82
C ₇ -3 h (ppm)	10.61	11.00	8.85	10.47	0.40	11.30	7.61	0.42
Ion capacity (mg/g)	0.15	0.15	33.45	1.50	165.8	0.60	6.00	141
Removal (%)	0.09	0.09	20.13	0.95	96.51	0.35	4.99	95.72
K _d (ml/g)	14	14	3.8 × 10 ³	143	4.1 × 10 ⁵	53	788	3.3 × 10 ⁵
Selectivity order	Cu < Ag, Hg							
0.005 g C ₇ -3 h (ppm)	10.60	10.99	2.22	10.42	0.001	8.82	6.85	0.001
Ion capacity (mg/g)	0.1	0.1	53.2	0.9	68.7	15.1	7.0	59
Removal (%)	0.19	0.18	79.96	1.42	99.99	22.22	14.48	99.99
K _d (ml/g)	11	11	2.4 × 10 ³	86	6.8 × 10 ⁷	1.7 × 10 ³	1.0 × 10 ³	5.9 × 10 ⁷
Selectivity order	Cd, Pb < Cu < Ag, Hg							
0.01 g C ₇ -3 h (ppm)	10.60	10.98	0.008	8.51	0.001	0.096	0.010	0.001
Ion capacity (mg/g)	0.06	0.09	33.2	6.2	34.3	33.7	24.0	29.4
Removal (%)	0.19	0.27	99.93	19.49	99.99	99.15	99.88	99.99
K _d (ml/g)	6	8	4.1 × 10 ⁶	726	3.4 × 10 ⁷	3.5 × 10 ⁵	2.4 × 10 ⁶	2.9 × 10 ⁷
Selectivity order	Cd, Pb < Cu < Ag, Hg							
0.02 g C ₇ -3 h (ppm)	10.16	10.61	0.002	0.071	0.001	0.010	0.006	0.0008
Ion capacity (mg/g)	0.7	0.6	16.6	15.7	17.2	17.0	12.0	14.7
Removal (%)	4.33	3.63	99.98	99.33	99.99	99.91	99.93	99.99
K _d (ml/g)	68	57	8.3 × 10 ⁶	2.2 × 10 ⁵	1.7 × 10 ⁷	1.7 × 10 ⁶	2.0 × 10 ⁶	1.8 × 10 ⁷
Selectivity order	Zn < Cd, Pb < Cu < Ag, Hg							
0.035 g C ₇ -3 h (ppm)	9.35	10.16	0.001	0.007	0.001	0.006	0.001	0.0007
Ion capacity (mg/g)	1.1	0.7	9.5	9.1	9.8	9.7	6.9	8.5
Removal (%)	11.96	7.72	99.99	99.93	99.99	99.95	99.99	99.99
K _d (ml/g)	116	72	9.5 × 10 ⁶	1.3 × 10 ⁶	9.8 × 10 ⁶	1.6 × 10 ⁶	6.9 × 10 ⁶	1.1 × 10 ⁷
Selectivity order	Ni, Co << Zn < Pb < Cd < Cu < Ag, Hg							

^aion concentration: ~10 ppm each cation.

V: 30 ml, m (mass of solid sample): 0.002 g-0.035 g.

The V/m ratios are 860, 1500, 3000, 6000, 15000, respectively.

Contact time: 3 h.

[0064] From Table 3 we can see that the present materials (0.01 g-0.035 g S₄-LDH and S₂-LDH) can rapidly reduce the concentrations of Cu²⁺, Hg²⁺ and Ag⁺ ions to a very low level. This, however, makes it difficult to carry out experiments to assess the potential to separate these ions from one another when all are present in solution. In order to distinguish the cations more clearly, we used much lower amounts of S₄-LDH (0.002 g) and S₂-LDH (0.005 g). For S₄-LDH, when using 0.002 g, a clear order of Cu²⁺ << Ag⁺, Hg²⁺ emerges, and 0.005 g and 0.01 g show an order of Cd²⁺, Pb²⁺ < Cu²⁺ << Ag⁺, Hg²⁺. When using 0.02 g, an order of Zn²⁺ < Cd²⁺, Pb²⁺ < Cu²⁺ < Ag⁺, Hg²⁺ was observed. Using an amount of 0.035 g S₄-LDH gave improved selectivity to Zn²⁺ and Cd²⁺ while those for other ions hardly changed, giving a final order of Ni²⁺, Co²⁺ < Zn²⁺ < Pb²⁺ < Cd²⁺ < Cu²⁺ < Ag⁺, Hg²⁺ (Table 3). For S₂-LDH, a similar selectivity order of Ni²⁺, Co²⁺ < Zn²⁺ < Cd²⁺ < Pb²⁺, Cu²⁺ < Ag⁺, Hg²⁺ was observed, with only a small difference for Cd²⁺ and Pb²⁺.

[0065] From Table 3, we can see that when using 0.02-0.035 g S₄-LDH (3 h contact time), >99% removal was observed for Cu²⁺, Zn²⁺, Ag⁺, Pb²⁺, Cd²⁺ and Hg²⁺ (actually 100% for Hg²⁺, Ag⁺ and Cu²⁺). Using lower amounts of S₄-LDH (e.g. 0.01 g) gave sharply decreased removal for Zn²⁺ (~20%), while even lower amounts (e.g. 0.005 g) gave only 1% removal. These small amounts, however, could still remove Ag⁺/Hg²⁺ with ~100% and Cu²⁺ with 80% efficiency. It should be noted that the removal of Co²⁺ and Ni²⁺ was negligible when using 0.01 g S₄-LDH and only 4-10% when using 0.02-0.035 g. The reasons for the much lower removal ability of S_x-LDH for Co²⁺ and Ni²⁺ relative to Cu²⁺ and Zn²⁺ are not clear.

[0066] The higher preference of S_x-LDH for Hg²⁺/Ag⁺ over Pb²⁺/Cd²⁺ is reflected in the K_d^{Hg} and K_d^{Ag} values which

are 10-100 times higher than those for Pb²⁺ and Cd²⁺. This shows that S_x-LDH is very selective for cations with high Lewis acid softness (i.e. Hg²⁺/Ag⁺ vs. Pb²⁺/Cd²⁺).

[0067] It is noted that for the highly toxic Hg²⁺, the K_d values can reach ~10⁷ mL/g, matching or exceeding those reported for commercial resins (~10⁴-5.1×10⁵ mL/g),^{71,72} the silane chelating fibers (3.0×10⁵-3.8×10⁶ mL/g),⁷³ chalcogel-1 (9.2×10⁶-1.6×10⁷)³⁵ and mesoporous thiol-functionalized silicates (3.4×10⁵-1.0×10⁸ mL/g).^{14,71,74} While the S_x-LDH materials form direct M-S bonds with the metal ions, the functionalized silica sorbents generally need incorporation of custom designed sulfur containing organic functional groups.

[0068] Clearly, the present materials can rapidly reduce the concentration of soft ions to very low levels. Namely, the S_x-LDH can decrease Ag⁺, Hg²⁺ and Cu²⁺ from 10 ppm to ≤1 ppb very fast (Table 2 and 3). The reduced Hg²⁺ concentration was always lower than 1 ppb, well below the acceptable level in drinking water (2 ppb).⁷⁵ These results indicate the potential of S_x-LDH as a kind of highly effective filters for immediate decontamination of water polluted with heavy metal ions especially Hg²⁺. Remarkably, enormous K_d values for Hg²⁺ and Ag⁺ were observed regardless of the S_x-LDH amount used, consistent with a tremendous affinity for these ions.

[0069] Relative Selectivity for Ag⁺ and Hg²⁺.

[0070] Generally, it is difficult to remove Hg²⁺ selectively from a mixture containing Ag⁺ ions. The ability to separate these two ions from one another is important because such a challenging problem is often encountered in mining operations of precious metals. From Tables 2 and 3 (regarding S₄-LDH), we can see that Ag⁺ and Hg²⁺ are so similar in their reactivity that they cannot be selectively separated using the S_x-LDH under the employed operating conditions. In an

attempt at selectively separating Ag^+ from Hg^{2+} , we used a solution containing Ag^+ and Hg^{2+} in 20 ppm concentration for each ion (no other cations were present). Then, a small quantity of S_x -LDH (0.001 g and 0.002 g) was used, which was sufficient to pick up only one of the two ions. From Table 4, we can see that when using 0.001 g S_4 -LDH, the K_d for Hg^{2+} is nearly 50 times greater than that for Ag^+ , while this drops to only 2.6 fold when using 0.002 g of solid. This means the S_4 -LDH has somewhat higher selectivity for Hg^{2+} than for Ag^+ . Similarly, S_2 -LDH also has higher selectivity toward

increased the solution concentration to 2.5-10 mM and the molar ratios to 0.7-3. As shown in Table 5, taking S_2 -LDH as an example, the uptakes for Hg^{2+} , Pb^{2+} , Ag^+ and Zn^{2+} are respectively 686, 483, 383, and 145 mg/g, corresponding to 3.42, 2.33, 3.55 and 2.22 mmol/g. For Cu^{2+} , the uptake is 127 mg/g or 2.01 mmol/g (Table 5). Even when using a smaller concentration of 2.5 mM and mixing the Hg^{2+} , Ag^+ and Cu^{2+} , the material still showed high levels of removal of 441, 254, and 172 mg/g. It suggests that S_x -LDH can remove large amounts of heavy metal ions.

TABLE 5

Adsorptive capacity toward individual metal ions (10 mM) by S_2 -LDH. ^a								
Ions	C_0		C_e -3 d		ion capacity		Removal	
	mM	ppm	mM	ppm	mg/g	mmol/g	(%)	K_d
Co^{2+}	8.93	526.21	6.10	359.53	83	1.40	31.7	232
Ni^{2+}	10.15	595.69	5.92	347.39	106	1.80	41.7	357
Cu^{2+}	9.69	615.38	5.01	318.52	127	2.01	48.2	466
Zn^{2+}	9.40	614.76	4.96	324.19	145	2.22	47.3	448
Ag^+	7.11	766.52	0.001	0.11	383	3.55	100	3×10^6
Pb^{2+}	9.47	1961.56	5.18	1072.88	483	2.33	45.3	414
Cd^{2+}	9.51	1068.92	8.15	916.28	57	0.50	14.3	83
Hg^{2+}	10.89	2184.94	4.06	813.43	686	3.42	62.8	843

^a~individual solutions each containing Co^{2+} , Ni^{2+} , Cu^{2+} , Zn^{2+} , Ag^+ , Pb^{2+} , Cd^{2+} , Hg^{2+} with a 10 mM concentration.
V, 10 ml; m, 0.02 g;
V/m ratio, 10/0.02 = 500.
Contact time: 3 d.

Hg^{2+} (Table 4). For S_2 -LDH, the K_d of Hg^{2+} was 36 times that of Ag^+ when using 0.001 g of solid and 7 fold when using 0.002 g of solid. Therefore a careful dosing of S_x -LDH material is important for the successful separation of these two ions.

TABLE 4

Selective adsorption results of S _x -LDH for the separation of Ag ⁺ from Hg ²⁺ . ^a				
	0.001 g		0.002 g	
	Ag ⁺	Hg ²⁺	Ag ⁺	Hg ²⁺
S ₄ -LDH				
C ₀ (ppm)	21.8	17.5	21.8	17.5
C _f - 6 h (ppm)	20.2	4.03	4.51	1.50
K _d - 6 h (ml/g)	2.3 × 10 ³	1.0 × 10 ⁵	5.7 × 10 ⁴	1.5 × 10 ⁵
pH - 6 h	2.84→4.46		2.84 →4.65	
S ₂ -LDH				
C ₀ (ppm)	21.8	17.5	21.8	17.5
C _f - 6 h (ppm)	20.6	5.76	8.86	1.73
K _d - 6 h (ml/g)	1.7 × 10 ³	6.1 × 10 ⁴	2.1 × 10 ⁴	1.4 × 10 ⁵
pH - 6 h	2.84→4.22		2.84→4.57	

^a 30 ml solution of $\text{Hg}(\text{NO}_3)_2$ and AgNO_3 , 20 ppm concentration per ion.

[0071] Uptake Capacity Toward Metal Ions.

[0072] In the single ion removal experiments described above, the molar ratio of each ion to the bonding sites ($[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$) in S_x -LDH materials is about 0.05, and in the mixed adsorption (all ions together), the molar ratio of all ions to the bonding sites is about 0.5. Therefore, the solid material used could quantitatively absorb the ions without saturating its exchange sites. In order to check the maximum capacity, we

[0073] Structural Characterization and Morphologies of Solids after Metal Adsorption.

[0074] In the case of smaller ion concentrations of 10 ppm, after adsorption the samples show increased basal spacings (d_{basal} by XRD) of 0.88/0.89, 0.82/0.83 nm. A Bragg peak at 0.76 nm corresponds to CO_3 -LDH, resulting from adventitious CO_3^{2-} anions (from air and water). The d_{basal} values of 0.88/0.89, 0.82/0.83 nm are attributed to various coordination motifs of metal ions to the $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ groups. It is noted that for Ag^+ containing samples, the d_{basal} values of 0.80 nm and 0.76 nm are unchanged, suggesting that insertion in low concentrations and binding to $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ does not cause a significant disruption in the interlayer space. When a large ion concentration of 10 mM was used the sample exhibited three d_{basal} values of 0.88, 0.82 and 0.78 nm.

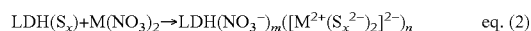
[0075] SEM images of the samples after metal ion adsorption show retention of the hexagonal prismatic shape. Although the Hg^{2+} solution is acidic with pH values of ~3, the S_x -LDH intercalates still kept the hexagonal prismatic morphology, indicating considerable stability in acidic environments.

[0076] Based on CHN analyses, the solids after metal adsorption had nearly no NO_3^- (no N content detected), but they had traces adventitious CO_3^{2-} (~1-2% C content). The presence of CO_3^{2-} ions is confirmed by the FT-IR spectra. Bands at 1358-1360 cm^{-1} and 771-776 cm^{-1} are the characteristic absorptions of CO_3 -LDH.⁶⁰ Compared with the strong CO_3^{2-} vibration, the NO_3^- adsorption is very weak, consistent with its trace content. Combining the XRD, IR data and CHN analyses, a possible structural arrangement is shown in the scheme of FIG. 1. CO_3^{2-} exists mainly as a distinct phase with basal spacing of 0.76/0.78 nm, while any trace NO_3^- may co-exist with M- S_x phases with a flat-lying conformation in the interlayer space.

[0077] The adsorption of metal ions proceeds by complexation with the interlayer $[S_x]^{2-}$ group to form polysulfide complexes.^{76, 77} In a way, the intercalated polysulfide species can act as a second host to incoming metal ions. Another important point in the IR spectra is the shift of the $\nu(M-O)$ vibrations from 663 to 681-683 cm^{-1} after metal adsorption. From its IR spectra, we know in pristine NO_3 -LDH the $\nu(M-O)$ vibration also appeared at 681 cm^{-1} . This indicates that the binding of metal ions to the polysulfide anions converts the S_x -LDH back to NO_3 -LDH plus associated MS_x species as a second phase. Additionally, the unchanged band at 447/448 cm^{-1} assigned to $\delta(O-M-O)$ vibrations⁶⁸ indicates the total stability of the LDH layer after the adsorption. Raman spectra after S_4 -LDH adsorbed metal ions (10 ppm) show the polysulfide S—S vibrations in the range of 151-475 cm^{-1} . The slight shift of the peaks relative to the metal-free S_4 -LDH reflects the interaction of the metal ions with the polysulfide.

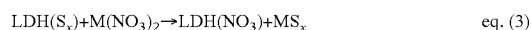
[0078] Depending on the S_4 -LDH/M ratio used, the above observations may be rationalized as follows.

[0079] 1) In the very low metal concentration limit, where the LDH- S_x material is in large excess, the following reaction scheme appears to operate:



[0080] In this case, adduct formation occurs and the various m and n values result in different basal spacings as observed in the XRD patterns of the samples (FIG. 3). This model is shown in Scheme 1b.

[0081] 2) In the high metal concentration limit the reactions are stoichiometric and may be represented under the double metathesis scheme shown below:



[0082] In this case, two phases $LDH(NO_3)$ and MS_x are formed. The MS_x phase is amorphous revealing no signatures in the XRD patterns. In both of the above cases, NO_3^- anions are present as verified by the IR adsorption at 1384 cm^{-1} .

[0083] Conclusions

[0084] The polysulfide $[S_x]^{2-}$ ($x=2, 4$) ions intercalate in a straightforward manner into the Mg/Al layered double hydroxides (Mg/Al-LDH) by anion-exchange. The basal spacings of the as-formed nanocomposites S_4 -LDH and S_2 -LDH suggest a flat lying arrangement in the interlayer. The S_x -LDH intercalates are remarkably selective toward heavy metal ions in aqueous solution. The materials display significant ion uptake and excellent selectivity for Cu^{2+} , Ag^+ and Hg^{2+} . A selectivity order of $Ni^{2+} < Co^{2+} < Zn^{2+} < Pb^{2+} < Cd^{2+} < Cu^{2+} < Ag^+$, Hg^{2+} was obtained. For the highly toxic Hg^{2+} , K_d values of $\sim 10^7$ mL/g were observed, comparable to or better than the previously reported materials. The S_x -LDH materials can quickly reduce Ag^+ and Hg^{2+} concentrations from 10 ppm to ≤ 1 ppb levels, well below the acceptable limits for drinking water. In mixed solutions with multiple kinds of ions present, even higher K_d values were observed compared to the individual ions solutions. The formation of M-S bonds between the intercalated polysulfides and the metal ions accounts for the effective removal for the heavy metals. After intercalation and metal loading, the materials retain their well-defined hexagonal prismatic shape, even under mild acidic conditions (pH $\sim$ 3), indicating good chemical stability. Because of their advantages, these LDH/polysulfide composite materials may be excellent candidates for use in highly efficient filters for rapid decontamination of water from heavy metal ions.

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Example 2

[0162] Herein we demonstrate the first example of LDH/polysulfide hybrids featuring high Hg⁰ capture ability. The polysulfides of [S_x]²⁻ contain a series of S—S bonds each of which can react with one atom of Hg⁰ to form S—Hg—S linkages which can produce HgS phase. Once saturated with Hg⁰ each polysulfide is left with a single S²⁻ atom which is

oxidized in air to SO_4^{2-} forming SO_4 -LDH. The scheme for this mercury capture is shown in FIG. 3. A second kind of LDH (named as $\text{LDH-NO}_3\text{—CoS}_4$), for which the S sites of the polysulfide were coordinated with Co^{2+} , was also studied. S_8 , K_2S_4 , $\text{LDH-NO}_3\text{—CoS}_4$ and NO_3 -LDH were also tested for Hg vapor absorption as control materials. The Hg adsorption capacity of S_x -LDH is significantly higher than known materials, despite the fact that the S_x -LDH have low BET surface areas.

EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

[0163] Materials.

[0164] Highly-crystallized MgAl—CO_3 -LDH was prepared by the HMT (hexamethylenetetramine) hydrolysis method^{34a,35a} as previously described.^{36a} A mixed solution (500 ml) containing $\text{Mg}(\text{NO}_3)_2$ (0.25 M), $\text{Al}(\text{NO}_3)_3$ (0.125 M) and HMT (0.325 M) was hydrothermally treated at 140° C. for 24 h in a Teflon-autoclave. The precipitate was filtered, water-washed, and vacuum-dried at 70° C. The MgAl—NO_3 -LDH was prepared through $\text{NO}_3^-/\text{CO}_3^{2-}$ exchange^{34a} by putting the CO_3 -LDH (0.8 g) in a solution containing 1.5 M NaNO_3 +5 mM HNO_3 , sealed after purging with N_2 and shaken for 24 h at ambient temperature. The resulting product was centrifuged, washed with degassed/deionized water and then vacuum-dried at 40° C. for 24 h.

[0165] Potassium polysulfide K_2S_x ($x=2, 4, 5$) precursors were prepared by the reaction of K and S in liquid ammonia as reported.^{37a} The NO_3^- anion in the LDH was exchanged with $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ to obtain the S_x -LDH materials. Typically, 0.2 g white powder of NO_3 -LDH and 0.2 g yellow powder of K_2S_x ($x=2, 4, 5$) were mixed in a 20 mL glass vial inside a nitrogen filled glovebox. Then 6 ml of newly-degassed deionized water was added into the vial after taking the vial out of the glovebox. The mixture became a yellow suspension. The vial was sealed and left at ambient temperature for 24 h for the completion of the reaction. The resulting S_x -LDH solids (yellow color) were filtered, washed with deionized water and acetone and finally air-dried at room temperature.

[0166] $\text{LDH-NO}_3\text{—CoS}_4$ was prepared through the reaction of S_4 -LDH and $\text{Co}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$. Briefly, 0.1 g yellow powder of S_4 -LDH and 0.1 g pink powder of $\text{Co}(\text{NO}_3)_2 \cdot 6\text{H}_2\text{O}$ were put into 20 mL glass vial and 6 mL degassed deionized water was added before sealing the vial. The obtained black suspension was left at ambient temperature for 24 h for the completeness of the reaction. The resulting black solid was filtered, washed with deionized water and acetone, air-dried at room temperature.

[0167] Mercury Capture Experiments.

[0168] The LDH-S_x intercalates were tested for elemental mercury capture in a closed vial set up as we previously reported.^{37a} Other materials of S_8 , K_2S_4 , $\text{LDH-NO}_3\text{—CoS}_4$ and MgAl—NO_3 -LDH were also tested for comparison purposes. An amount of 0.20 g of Hg^0 was placed at the bottom of the glass vial and 0.05 g of solid sample was placed above, supported by conical shaped filter paper at the top of the vial to avoid direct contact with elemental mercury. The vials were capped, wrapped with Teflon tape, and transferred inside a larger glass vial in order to prevent Hg^0 leakage as well as to ensure homogeneous transfer of heat to the inner vials. The larger vials were then placed in the sand bath where the temperature was kept ~140° C. for 1-2 days. Within a certain period of time (1-2 days), the sand bath was cooled to room temperature and the solid samples were collected to evaluate the amount of Hg^0 captured. The sample weight

before and after Hg^0 capture was measured to estimate the Hg^0 captured in the sample. ICP, EDS and XPS analyses were used to confirm the mercury presence inside the samples.

[0169] Physical Characterization and Chemical Analyses.

[0170] Powder X-ray diffraction (XRD) patterns were collected using a Phillips X'pert Pro MPD diffractometer with $\text{Cu-K}\alpha$ radiation, at room temperature, with step size of 0.0167°, scan time of 15 s per step, and 2θ ranging from 4.5 to 70°. The generator setting was 40 kV and 40 mA. Fourier transformed infrared (FT-IR) spectra of the samples were recorded on a Nicolet-380 Fourier-Transform infrared spectrometer using the KBr pellet method. Raman spectra were taken from 100 to 1500 cm^{-1} on a microscopic confocal Raman spectrometer (LabRAM Aramis, Horiba JobinYvon) using a 633 nm He—Ne laser. Scanning electron microscope (SEM), elemental distribution mappings, and energy dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDX) measurements were carried out using a Hitachi S-4800 microscope, which provided chemical composition analyses. The surface area was measured by nitrogen adsorption/desorption isotherms at 77K for relative pressures (P/P_0) in the range of 0.05-0.30 with Micromeritics Tristar II system, using the Brunauer-Emmett-Teller (BET) model. The samples were degassed at 298 K under vacuum for 12 h before analysis, to remove any adsorbed impurities.

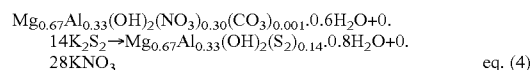
[0171] X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) studies were performed using a Thermo Scientific ESCALAB 250 Xi spectrometer equipped with a monochromatic Al $\text{K}\alpha$ X-ray source (1486.6 eV) and operated at 300 W. Samples were analyzed under vacuum ($P < 10^{-8}$ mbar), whereas survey scans and high-resolution scans were collected using pass energy of 25 eV. Binding energies were referred to the C 1s binding energy at 284.6 eV. A low-energy electron flood gun was employed for charge neutralization. Prior to XPS measurements, powders were pressed on copper foil and mounted on stubs and successively put into the entry-load chamber to be evacuated. Fitting of the peaks has been made by using the software Avantage.

[0172] The metal content in the solid samples after adsorption was determined by inductively coupled plasma atomic emission spectroscopy (ICP-AES, Jarrel-ASH, ICAP-9000), and 0.1 M HNO_3 solution was used to dissolve the solids. CHN chemical analyses of the solid samples were performed using an Elementar Vario EL elemental analyzer.

[0173] Results and Discussion

[0174] Synthesis and Characterization of S-LDH Materials and $\text{LDH-NO}_3\text{—CoS}_4$.

[0175] The synthesis of polysulfide containing LDH materials, taking S_2 -LDH as an example, was accomplished via the ion-exchange reaction of $[\text{S}_2]^{2-}$ with NO_3^- as shown in eq. (4).



[0176] Based on ICP, CHN elemental analysis and charge balance considerations, the compositions of CO_3 -LDH, NO_3 -LDH, S_2 -LDH, S_4 -LDH and S_5 -LDH were determined, for details see Supporting Information. Generally, the highly-charged anions preferentially occupy the LDH interlayers,^{38a-42a} and the high the negative charge of $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ ions provides a stronger electrostatic driving force for the ion-exchange in comparison with the singly-charged NO_3^- . The ion-exchange of $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ with NO_3^- is nearly complete although some adventitious CO_3^{2-} anions also enter the sys-

tem due to the well known strong affinity of CO_3^{2-} for the LDH layers.^{38a} In addition, SEM analyses indicate that after the ion-exchange the S_4 -LDH crystallites fully maintain the hexagonal prismatic shape of the NO_3 -LDH precursor,^{43a} implying a topotactic intercalation reaction of the $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ with NO_3^- anions.

[0177] XRD patterns of the S_x -LDH materials and Hg-laden samples were obtained. The sharp and symmetric diffraction peaks indicate that the samples obtained are highly crystalline. All compounds exhibit a series of strong (00l) Bragg reflections a characteristic of the layered nature of the phases. The d values of 0.76 and 0.89 nm correspond to the interlayer spacing of CO_3^{2-} and NO_3 -LDHs. For the S_2 -LDH, a series of strong (00l) reflections at 0.80, 0.40, 0.27, 0.20, 0.17 nm was observed, indicating a layered phase with a basal spacing (d_{basal}) of 0.80 nm. The S_x -LDH intercalates reveal very close d_{basal} values of 0.80/0.81/0.80 nm, though $[\text{S}_4]^{2-}$ and $[\text{S}_5]^{2-}$ groups have much bigger size based on the longer chains in comparison with $[\text{S}_2]^{2-}$. Considering the thickness of the LDH layer of 0.48 nm^{44a} and the d_{basal} values of the three S_x -LDH samples, the gallery height of ~0.32 nm (=0.80-0.48) corresponds to a similar flat arrangement of the zig-zag $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ group in the interlayer, as we previously described.^{14a} The intercalation of $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ anions shifts the position of (00l) reflections. However, the peak at d=0.15 nm corresponding to the (110) plane of the LDH layers remains unchanged, signifying the stability of the brucite sheets during the ion-exchange process, i.e. a topotactic ion-exchange. This result is also supported by the SEM observations as described above.

[0178] After reacting the S_4 -LDH with a solution of $\text{Co}(\text{NO}_3)_2$, the obtained product, LDH- NO_3 - CoS_4 , showed a d_{basal} of 0.88 nm, being very similar to the NO_3 -LDH precursor in which NO_3^- is the backbone of the gallery, which suggest the formation of a composite containing an amorphous " CoS_4 " phase.

[0179] Although XRD patterns of the S_2 -LDH and S_4 -LDH samples suggested existence of CO_3^{2-} , no separate CO_3^{2-} intercalated LDH phase was observed. This indicates that the CO_3^{2-} anions co-exist with $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ in the interlayer space. However, in S_5 -LDH, an obvious Bragg peak appears at 0.39 nm, possibly corresponding to the (006) reflection of the CO_3^{2-} intercalated LDH. Several experiments with varying doses of K_2S_5 did not remove the diffraction peak of 0.39 nm. This may be due to the fact that larger steric hindrance of the $[\text{S}_5]^{2-}$ chains prohibits co-existence with CO_3^{2-} in the same gallery. Therefore, CO_3^{2-} anions produce a separate intercalated phase (CO_3 -LDH), for which the (003) basal reflection at 0.78 nm probably nearly overlaps with the 0.80 nm reflection.

[0180] The successful ion-exchange and presence of $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ in the intercalated compounds was further demonstrated by IR and Raman spectra, as we previously described.^{14a} Obvious evidence of the presence of S—S bonds in K_2S_x and S_x -LDH was verified by the Raman spectra. Taking K_2S_5 as an example, peaks at 175, 252, 269, 431 and 495 cm^{-1} were consistent with the reported values for K_2S_5 .^{45a} After intercalation of $[\text{S}_5]^{2-}$ anions into the LDH, the main S—S vibration bands remain, but with a position shift or intensity change for certain bands. These observations confirm the presence of S—S bonds and suggest certain interactions of the inserted $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ guests with the LDH layer.

[0181] X-ray photoelectron spectra of S_2 -LDH and S_4 -LDH confirm the presence of polysulfides. The S 2p_{1/2}

binding energy should be 165 eV, and the 2p_{3/2} binding energies are 160-171 eV depending on different oxidation states and chemical environments.^{46a} For example, the value ranges from 160.0-163.6 eV for sulfide^{46a} and polysulfides $[\text{S}_n]^{2-}$,^{47a} 163.6-164.0 eV for S_n^0 , 166-168 eV for sulfite (SO_3^{2-}), and 168-171 eV for sulfate (SO_4^{2-}).^{47a} An assignment of the binding energies of the S_x -LDH is summarized in Table 6. S_2 -LDH and S_4 -LDH revealed broad bands within the range of about 160-164 eV. This large range is consistent with the presence of multivalent oxidation states of sulfur. More specifically, S_2 -LDH exhibits bands at 163.6, 162.3 and 161.0, while S_4 -LDH shows bands at 163.3, 162.2 and 160.9 eV, respectively corresponding to the binding energies of sulfur 2p for S^0 , S^{1-} and S^{2-} . The S^{2-} state in the two compounds may result from the partial decomposition of the $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ anion ($[\text{S}_x]^{2-} \rightarrow (x-1)\text{S}^{2-} + \text{S}^0$). The S^0 state in S_2 -LDH may also appear accordingly. In S_4 -LDH, S^0 should originate mainly from $[\text{S}_4]^{2-}$ itself. Additionally, in S_2 -LDH and S_4 -LDH, there are weak peaks at 167.9 eV and 167.4 eV. These peaks suggest partial oxidation of the $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ to SO_3^{2-} ,^{46a} due to air exposure, based on the reference value of 166-168 eV for sulfite (SO_3^{2-}).^{46a} X-ray photoelectron spectra of these materials were also obtained after Hg adsorption and show the appearance of Hg excitation peaks, which will be discussed below.

TABLE 6

XPS data and assignment of S and Hg oxidation states for S_x -LDH materials before and after Hg adsorption.			
samples		Binding energy (eV)*	Assignment
S_2 -LDH	Before Hg adsorption	163.6	2p of S^0
		162.3	2p of S^{1-}
		161.0	2p of S^{2-}
	After Hg adsorption	163.1	2p of S^0
		161.8	2p of S^{1-}
		160.7	2p of S^{2-}
		168.2	2p of S^{6+} (SO_4^{2-})
		103.98	4f _{5/2} of Hg^{2+}
		99.98	4f _{7/2} of Hg^{2+}
		163.3	2p of S^0
S_4 -LDH	Before Hg adsorption	162.2	2p of S^{1-}
		160.9	2p of S^{2-}
		162.4	2p of S^0
	After Hg adsorption	161.8	2p of S^{1-}
		161.2	2p of S^{2-}
		168.5	2p of S^{6+} (SO_4^{2-})
		105.3	4f _{5/2} of Hg^{2+}
		103.8	4f _{5/2} of Hg^0
		100.9	4f _{7/2} of Hg^{2+}
		99.6	4f _{7/2} of Hg^0

*the binding energies were obtained from the deconvoluted peak positions.

[0182] Hg Vapor Capture

[0183] The intercalated polysulfide ions in S_x -LDH and the easy accessibility of guest species in these layered structures suggest a high potential affinity for Hg vapor with the driving force being the strong tendency to combine with S—S bonds forming S—Hg—S species and ultimately HgS. The S_x -LDH materials were tested for mercury vapor capture using a previously described experimental setup.^{37a} The Hg^0 capture is rapid as judged by the quick change in color of the starting materials and by the very substantial weight gain of the samples. After 1 h adsorption, we observed that the materials became black, and the intensity of black color increased with time. A control experiment, carried out with $\text{MgAl}-\text{NO}_3$ -

LDH, showed no change in weight or color even after extended exposure (3 days) to Hg⁰ vapor.

[0184] The adsorption capacity of Hg was calculated from the mass difference of the samples before and after the experiments. The adsorption capacities are impressive and listed in Table 7. To further evaluate the actual amount of Hg captured by either chemisorption or physisorption, we employed two additional methods to quantify the amount captured. One is EDS analysis to determine the relative atomic ratio of Hg/S and calculate the amount of mercury bound to the S sites of the S_x-LDH materials. The other is ICP analysis where the solids were dissolved using dilute HNO₃ or HCl solution (0.1 M), and the Hg/Al ratio was calculated to quantify the adsorbed amount of Hg. The calculated details with a few examples and resulting values are shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7

Mercury vapor capture results for S _x -LDH samples. ^a						
samples	EDS results			ICP results		Theoretical chemisorption capacity ^c (μg/g)
	Adsorption capacity ^b (μg/g)	Adsorption capacity (μg/g)	Hg/S ratio	Adsorption capacity (μg/g)	Mg/Al ratio	Hg/Al ratio
S ₂ -LDH	5.0 × 10 ⁵	(3.0-4.0) × 10 ^{5d}	0.46-0.61	4.9 × 10 ⁵	1.9	0.64
S ₄ -LDH	7.0 × 10 ⁵	(6.5-7.6) × 10 ⁵	0.58-0.68	7.4 × 10 ^{5e}	1.9	0.94
S ₅ -LDH	8.4 × 10 ⁵	(7.7-8.9) × 10 ⁵	0.80-0.92	1.0 × 10 ⁶	1.9	1.57
K ₂ S ₄	1.4 × 10 ⁵	(1.9-2.7) × 10 ^{5f}	0.05-0.07	—	—	—
LDH-NO ₃ -CoS ₄	1.0 × 10 ⁵	0	0	—	—	—
S ₈	1.0 × 10 ⁵	0	0	0	—	—
MgAl-NO ₃ -LDH	no	0	0	0	—	—

^aThree samples were used to evaluate these results. sample: 0.05 g, Hg: 0.20 g. Temp: 140° C. time: 24 h.

^bThe values were got from the mass difference of samples by weighing them before and after Hg adsorption.

^cThese theoretical values were based on the decomposition formula of S_x-LDH, that is Hg⁰ + S_x-LDH → (x-1)HgS + SO₄-LDH, and the ideally combined Hg from it, as shown in the main text of the paper.

^dTaking S₂-LDH as an example, the Hg adsorption capacity is calculated as: 1 g/85 (g/mol) × 0.14 × 2 × 0.61 × 200.6 (g/mol) = 0.403 g = 4.0 × 10⁵ μg/g

^eadsorption capacity was deduced by Hg/Al molar ratios from ICP (S content is not exact from ICP so we did not use S) and the formula of S₄-LDH: For example, the Hg adsorption capacity of S₄-LDH is: 1 g/93 (g/mol) × 0.33 × 0.94 × 200.6 (g/mol) = 0.436 g = 7.4 × 10⁵ μg/g

^fThe value was deduced by Hg/S molar ratio from EDS and the formula of K₂S₄.

^gThe value was deduced from the reacting formula of 3Hg + K₂S₄ → 3 HgS + K₂S

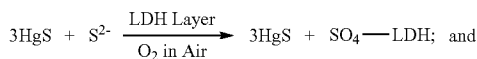
[0185] The theoretical chemisorption capacities can be deduced according to the formula of S_x-LDH, which is discussed as follows. For S₄-LDH, the polysulfide of [S₄]²⁻ is composed of S²⁻ + 3S⁰, in which only S⁰ is capable of absorbing Hg vapor to form HgS (identified by XRD). The residual S²⁻ is not reactive toward Hg⁰ and in the basic LDH environment is easily oxidized to form SO₄²⁻ (x=3, 4).

[0186] So the reactions of [S₄]²⁻ with the adsorbed Hg⁰ are:

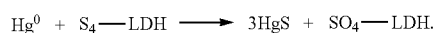
1)



2)



3)



[0187] In this case, the molar ratio of Hg/S should be 3:4 (=0.75).

[0188] In addition, based on the S₄-LDH formula of Mg_{0.67}Al_{0.33}(OH)₂(S_{4.0.13}(NO₃)_{0.01}(CO₃)_{0.04}·0.8H₂O, the theo-

retical amount of adsorbed Hg by S₄-LDH should be 8.4×10⁵ μg/g (Supporting Information). Similarly for S₂-LDH and S₅-LDH the theoretically absorbed Hg is 3.3×10⁵ μg/g and 7.6×10⁵ μg/g, respectively (Supporting Information).

[0189] The EDS analysis of the samples showed atomic Hg/S ratios of 0.46-0.61, 0.58-0.68 and 0.80-0.92 for S₂-LDH, S₄-LDH and S₅-LDH, respectively, see Table 7. These values correspond to the Hg adsorption capacities of (3.0-4.0)×10⁵, (6.5-7.6)×10⁵, and (7.7-8.9)×10⁵ μg/g, based on the S amount in the samples (from their formula). The results are in agreement with the expected theoretical adsorption capacities discussed above. Interestingly, the S₅-LDH showed larger adsorption capacities (100%) than the theoretical ones (by 24%), which may be due to high physisorption capacity for elemental Hg⁰. XRD patterns revealed that all

samples laden with mercury had diffraction peaks that suggest crystalline HgS as a second phase during the Hg capturing process.

[0190] The ICP analyses of Hg-loaded S_x-LDH samples also provided Hg/Al molar ratios. In Table 7, S₄-LDH is given as an example to illustrate the calculation method used to determine the sample's adsorption capacity. The ICP evaluation showed mercury adsorption capacities of 4.9×10⁵, 7.4×10⁵ and 1.0×10⁶ μg/g, respectively, for S₂-LDH, S₄-LDH and S₅-LDH, giving values close to those obtained from the EDS analyses. The adsorption capacities determined by ICP for S₂-LDH and S₄-LDH are close to the theoretical values, whereas S₅-LDH reveals a larger capacity of 1.0×10⁶ μg/g, possibly due to physisorption, as found by the EDS observations.

[0191] These above results agree well with simple weight gain experiments which showed adsorption capacities of 5.0×10⁵, 7.0×10⁵, and 8.4×10⁵ μg/g for S₂-LDH, S₄-LDH and S₅-LDH, respectively (Table 7). The lower values by weighing for S₅-LDH are possibly due to the loss of sample particles that stick to the surface of filter paper during the isolation process.

[0192] All of the adsorption capacity values of the S_x-LDH materials are comparable to those of previously reported metal-chalcogenide chalcogels composed of Pt²⁺ and

polysulfide clusters,^{37a} and are much higher than those of commercially used or academically studied materials, including phenolic polymers,^{6a} sulfur impregnated coal,^{6a} sulfur functionalized copper doped Fe nanoparticles,^{7a} and sulfur functionalized porous silica,^{8a} as shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8

Mercury vapor adsorption capacity of various adsorbents in this work and references.				
	Temperature (° C.)	surface area (m ² /g)	adsorption capacity (μg/g)	references
S _x -LDH	140	9-13	(0.3-1.0) × 10 ⁶	This work
K—Pt—S _x ^a	140	74-230	(0.43-5.45) × 10 ⁶	37 ^a
ZTS-cg ^b	140	503-520	2.94 × 10 ⁴	37 ^a , 52 ^a
Cu—S—Si ^c	140	391	1.98 × 10 ⁴	8 ^a
PILOT5-S40 ^d	140	160	1.44 × 10 ³	6 ^a
ACF-20-S40 ^e	140	94	3.26 × 10 ³	6 ^a
Fe—Cu—S ^f	140	30	(0.17-2.73) × 10 ³	7 ^a

^a Metal-chalcogenide aerogels from Pr²⁺ and polysulfide clusters ([S_x]²⁻, x = 3-6).

^b Zinc tin sulfide (Zn²⁺—[SnS₄]⁴⁻) chalcogel.

^c Copper-doped sulfur functionalized porous silica.

^d Sulfur impregnated coal.

^e Phenolic polymer.

^f Sulfur-functionalized copper-doped Fe nanoparticle.

[0193] Nitrogen adsorption/desorption measurements of our S_x-LDH samples show that they have similar nitrogen adsorption isotherms patterns and BET surface areas of ~10-13 m²/g (Table 8, FIGS. 2A, 2B and 2B, Supporting Information) which is also similar to the MgAl—NO₃-LDH precursor.^{48a} Despite the significantly smaller surface areas of our S_x-LDH samples compared to those of previously reported materials (even up to 520 m²/g),^{49a} they exhibit much higher adsorption (Table 8). This confirms that the presence of the polysulfide groups and their high reactivity for Hg⁰ plays a more significant role in the adsorption process than surface area. The high Hg⁰ uptake values of S_x-LDH illustrate excellent mercury vapor capturing functionality of the polysulfide-containing materials.

[0194] To further assess the performance of S_x-LDH toward Hg vapor capture, several control experiments were conducted. In this regard we studied crystalline S₈, K₂S₄, LDH-NO₃—CoS₄, and MgAl—NO₃-LDH. The molecular S₈ has the S—S bonds and it is crystalline, K₂S₄ also has available S—S bonds similar to S_x-LDH, it is crystalline but lacks the LDH layer, LDH-NO₃—CoS₄ has S species but no significant polysulfide, while MgAl—NO₃-LDH lacks any S species. As seen in Table 7, K₂S₄ displayed lower Hg capturing capability than the S_x-LDH materials. K₂S₄ and LDH-NO₃—CoS₄ showed much lower mercury capture (determined by weight gain). The low value observed with S₈ itself may be due to its relatively dense structure. For LDH-NO₃—CoS₄, Hg capture is limited possibly because of the coordination of S_x groups with Co²⁺ ions moderates the reactivity with Hg⁰. Lacking S species, MgAl—NO₃-LDH did not show Hg capture. These control experiments confirm that both the rich polysulfide sites and the presence of LDH slabs acting as supports^{49a} contribute to the mercury adsorption efficiency.

[0195] Structural Characterization and Morphologies of Hg-Laden Solids

[0196] As shown in their XRD patterns, the samples after Hg adsorption (S_x-LDH-Hg) show a series of strong (00l) reflections (0.88, 0.44 and 0.29 nm) indicating a layered phase with a d_{basal} of 0.88 nm. This is consistent with the SO₄²⁻ intercalated LDH phase,^{34a,50a}. Besides the SO₄-LDH phase, crystalline HgS (56476-ICSD) appeared, verifying the capture of Hg. The lower diffraction intensity of SO₄-LDH is consistent with the high fraction of HgS in the samples. In addition, the control samples (S₈, K₂S₄, LDH-NO₃—CoS₄) showed formation of HgS (Supporting Information), indicating reaction with Hg⁰ to a small extent. The formation of SO₄-LDH during the Hg adsorption process was also indicated by IR results. A vibration at 1108 cm⁻¹ signified the presence of SO₄²⁻.^{34a,50a}

[0197] XPS spectra support the formation of HgS and SO₄-LDH after Hg adsorption. Similar to the starting materials, the Hg-laden samples of S₂-LDH-Hg and S₄-LDH-Hg showed S 2p peaks, corresponding to various oxidation states of S⁰, S¹⁻ and S²⁻. The lower binding energy of S peaks (163.1-160.7 eV in S₂-LDH-Hg, and 162.4-161.2 eV in S₄-LDH-Hg) implies that the S groups mainly exist as S²⁻ in HgS (Table 6). In addition, Hg 4f peaks (103.98 and 99.98 eV in S₂-LDH-Hg, and 105.3-99.6 eV in S₄-LDH-Hg) are observed. These are consistent with the reference values,^{46a,51a} where the 4f_{5/2} and 4f_{7/2} binding energies are respectively ~105 and ~101 eV (the 4f_{7/2} binding energies are 99.5-100 eV in Hg, 100.2-101.1 eV in HgS). The XPS results further verify the oxidation of [S_x]²⁻ to SO₄²⁻ during the adsorption process. In addition, a shift in binding energy to lower values signified the change of S environment (from free [S_x]²⁻ state to S²⁻ of HgS) after Hg adsorption. These results are also consistent with the XRD and IR analyses. Interestingly, in addition to the S⁰, S¹⁻ and S²⁻ states, the XPS spectra after mercury absorption (by both S₂-LDH and S₄-LDH) exhibit a peak at 168.2 and 168.5 eV, which are attributed to SO₄²⁻ (169-171 eV).^{46a} Normally, one would expect the formation of S₈ by oxidation of S²⁻, however the strongly basic character of the metal hydroxide layers may be exerting a catalytic effect that overoxidizes to SO₄²⁻.

[0198] Raman spectra indicated that after Hg adsorption the S—S bonds disappear in all S_x-LDH samples because of the formation of HgS. For the control samples of S₈ and K₂S₄, which show poor Hg adsorption, the spectra retained obvious S—S bond stretching peaks.

[0199] SEM observations of the Hg-laden samples reveal that after the Hg⁰ adsorption, the main crystalline morphology retains the hexagonal prismatic shape as the starting S_x-LDH materials. The presence of the HgS phase was verified by the elemental distribution maps and EDX measurements. Based on the elemental distribution maps, the HgS phase appears to be inhomogeneously distributed. The exact morphology of the HgS phase could not be clearly distinguished possibly due to its small size.

[0200] Concluding Remarks

[0201] Intercalating the polysulfide [S_x]²⁻ (x=2, 4, 5) guests into the Mg/Al layered double hydroxides (MgAl-LDH) creates powerful Hg vapor capture materials. The LDH host layer provides the interlayer polysulfide guests with increased environmental stability, easy accessibility by the adsorbed species and high reactivity toward Hg vapor. The presence of the S—S bonds of the polysulfides in the interlayer space of the LDH structure are the driving force for Hg

capture via the formation of strong S—Hg—S bonds. During the Hg adsorption process, the remaining S^{2-} of polysulfides is oxidized to SO_4^{2-} and passivated forming SO_4 -LDH. The Hg captured capacities of S_2 -LDH, S_4 -LDH and S_5 -LDH are very high at 5.0×10^5 , 7.6×10^5 and 1.0×10^6 $\mu\text{g/g}$, reaching 50-100% adsorption rates by weight. Even with their low BET surface areas, the adsorption capacities of S_x -LDH materials are comparable to or higher than previously reported outstanding materials. The present work highlights the potential of S_x -LDH materials as superior Hg vapor sorbents and the earth-abundance of Mg/Al and sulfur make them cost-effective as well as environmentally safe for consideration in real applications.

Supporting Information

[0202] The Chemical Formula of the Samples:

[0203] The compositions of the samples were determined based on ICP, CHN analysis and charge balance consideration. They are $Mg_{0.66}Al_{0.34}(OH)_2(CO_3)_{0.17} \cdot 0.8H_2O$, $Mg_{0.67}Al_{0.33}(OH)_2(NO_3)_{0.30}(CO_3)_{0.01} \cdot 0.6H_2O$, $Mg_{0.67}Al_{0.33}(OH)_2(S_2)_{0.14}(NO_3)_{0.01}(CO_3)_{0.02} \cdot 0.8H_2O$, $Mg_{0.67}Al_{0.33}(OH)_2(S_4)_{0.13}(NO_3)_{0.01}(CO_3)_{0.04} \cdot 0.8H_2O$ and $Mg_{0.67}Al_{0.33}(OH)_2(S_5)_{0.09}(NO_3)_{0.01}(CO_3)_{0.07} \cdot 0.9H_2O$ for CO_3 -LDH, NO_3 -LDH, S_2 -LDH, S_4 -LDH and S_5 -LDH, respectively.

[0204] The Calculation of Theoretical Chemisorption Capacity.

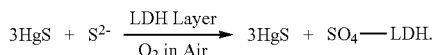
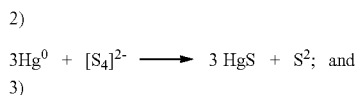
[0205] The theoretical chemisorption capacities can be deduced according to the decomposition formula of S_x -LDH, which is discussed as follows:

[0206] 1). S_4 -LDH: Normally, the polysulfide can decomposed to elemental sulfur (S_0) and ionic S^{2-} . The decomposition of $[S_4]^{2-}$ is followed as:



whereas S^0 can oxidize Hg^0 to form HgS , the remaining residual S^{2-} is unstable and oxidizes in air to form SO_4^{2-} in the presence of LDH layer, and then intercalates into the LDH gallery spaces.

[0207] The proposed reactions of $[S_4]^{2-}$ with the adsorbed Hg^0 are:



The total net reaction of Hg^0 with S_4 -LDH is then:



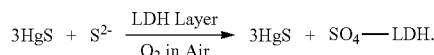
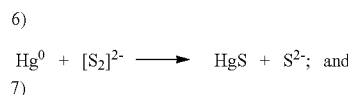
In this case, the molar ratio of Hg/S should be 3:4 (=0.75). In addition, based on the S_4 -LDH formula of $Mg_{0.67}Al_{0.33}(OH)_2(S_4)_{0.13}(NO_3)_{0.01}(CO_3)_{0.04} \cdot 0.8H_2O$ with a molecular weight (M) of 93 g/mol, the S moles per gram S_4 -LDH are 0.0056 mol/g (=4×0.13 mol/93 g), so the theoretical adsorbed Hg of S_4 -LDH should be:

$$0.56 \times 0.75 \text{ mol/g} = 0.0042 \text{ mol/g} = 0.0042 \times 200 \text{ g Hg/g} = 8.4 \times 10^5 \mu\text{g/g.}$$

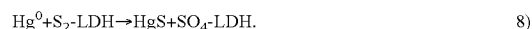
[0208] 2) S_2 -LDH: $[S_2]^{2-}$ decomposition:



Reactions of $[S_2]^{2-}$ with Hg^0 :



The total reaction of Hg^0 with S_2 -LDH is:

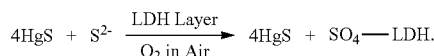
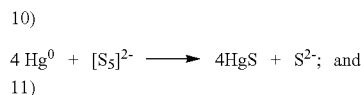


So in this case, the molar ratio of Hg/S should be 1:2=0.5. Based on the S_2 -LDH formula of $Mg_{0.67}Al_{0.33}(OH)_2(S_2)_{0.14}(NO_3)_{0.01}(CO_3)_{0.02} \cdot 0.8H_2O$ (M=85 g/mol), the S moles per gram S_2 -LDH are 0.0033 mol/g (=2×0.14 mol/85 g), so the theoretical adsorbed Hg is: 0.0033×0.5 mol/g=0.0016 mol/g=0.00165×200 g Hg/g=3.3×10⁵ $\mu\text{g/g}$.

[0209] 3) S_5 -LDH: The decomposition reaction of $[S_5]^{2-}$ is:



The reactions of $[S_5]^{2-}$ with Hg^0 are:



The total reaction of Hg^0 with S_5 -LDH is:



Here the molar ratio of Hg/S should be 4:5=0.8. The formula of S_5 -LDH is $Mg_{0.67}Al_{0.33}(OH)_2(S_5)_{0.09}(NO_3)_{0.01}(CO_3)_{0.07} \cdot 0.9H_2O$ (M=94 g/mol), so the S moles per gram S_5 -LDH are 0.0048 mol/g (=5×0.09/94), and the theoretical adsorbed Hg is: 0.0048×0.8 mol/g=0.0038 mol/g=0.0038×200 g Hg/g=7.6×10⁵ $\mu\text{g/g}$.

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Example 3

[0262] This example illustrates the use of polysulfide intercalated LDHs for uranium capture applications. A scheme for the capture of UO_2^{2+} is shown in FIG. 7.

[0263] Materials.

[0264] The K_2S_4 precursor was prepared by the reaction of K and S in liquid ammonia as described previously. The $[\text{S}_x]^{2-}$ anions were exchanged with NO_3^- -LDH to get the S_4 -LDH as previously reported.^{26b}

[0265] Uranium Uptake Experiments.

[0266] The uranium uptake from aqueous solutions of various concentrations and seawater was carried out by the batch method. The solid sorbent was immersed in the solutions with intermittent shaking for 24 h and 3 days. After mixing the solid sorbents with the solutions for a certain time, a filtration was performed and the concentrations of metal ions in the supernatant solution (separated by centrifugation) were determined using inductively coupled plasma-atomic emission spectroscopy (ICP-AES) and inductively coupled plasma-mass spectroscopy (ICP-MS) for extra low ion concentration. The adsorptive capacity was evaluated from the difference between initial and final metal concentrations in the mother and supernatant solutions.

[0267] The distribution coefficient K_d is given by the equation $K_d = (V[(C_0 - C_f)/C_f])/m$, where C_0 and C_f are respectively the initial and final concentration of M^{n+} (ppm) after the contact, V is the volume (mL) of the testing solution, and m is the amount of the solid sorbent (g) used in the experiment. In our experiments, V:m ratios of 100-1000 mL/g and room temperature were used.

[0268] The UO_2^{2+} uptake from solutions of various concentrations (20-600 ppm) was studied by the batch method at V:m=1000 mL/g, room temperature, and 24 h contact. These data were used for the determination of UO_2^{2+} sorption isotherms.

[0269] The competitive capture experiments of UO_2^{2+} with Ca^{2+} and Na^+ using $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ were carried out with the batch method at V:m ratio 1000 mL/g, room temperature, and 24 h contact.

[0270] Adsorption studies with contaminated potable water, natural seawater and contaminated seawater (by adding ~30 ppb Uranyl ions to the regular seawater) were also performed. For each experiment, a total of 15-300 mg of $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ was weighted into a 50 mL centrifugal tube. Then 15-30 mL of water solution was added to each tube and the mixture was kept under stirring for 24 h.

[0271] Kinetic Studies.

[0272] UO_2^{2+} ion-exchange experiments of various reaction times (10-180 min) have been performed. For each experiment, a total of 250 mg of solid sample was weighted into a 50 mL centrifugal tube. A 25 mL sample of water containing UO_2^{2+} (~5 ppb) was added to each tube. The suspensions from the various reactions were filtered and the resulting solutions were analyzed for their uranium content with ICP-MS.

[0273] 2. Results and Discussion

[0274] The uranyl ion capture equilibrium data with the changing U concentrations are shown in Table 9 and FIG. 4. Following the increase of U concentrations, the removal capacity can reach a maximum (q_m) of 205 mg U/g. The % removal can reach $\geq 97\%$ under the U concentration of 20-100 ppm, and the distribution coefficient (K_d^U) values are (1.1×10^4) – (3.4×10^6) mL/g at the U concentration range of 20-350 ppm.

[0275] EDS data showed a U/S molar ratio of $\frac{1}{3}$, which coincides with the bonding mode of one $[\text{S}_4]^{2-}$ group attached to one UO_2^{2+} ion. The 5.25% molar content of U also indicated the significant capture capacity for uranium.

[0276] From XRD patterns of the samples after adsorption, we can see at low concentration (<50 ppm) the basal spacing of 0.81/0.82 nm; the same as the starting material retained, possibly due to the low adsorbed U amount. At 50-120 ppm, there are two basal spacings of 0.82 and 0.89 nm appearing, while at concentration of ≥ 120 ppm, the 0.89 nm is dominant, indicating a high captured amount of U.

[0277] Because Ca^{2+} ions exist in relatively high concentrations in wastewater and usually constitute strong competitors for the ion exchange of toxic ions, we investigated the effect of CaCl_2 on the UO_2^{2+} -sorption properties of $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$. From Table 10 and FIG. 5, we can see that $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ has a remarkably high selectivity for UO_2^{2+} on the Ca^{2+} competition.

[0278] Very high removal capacities (95-99%) and excellent K_d^U values [(2.1×10^4) – (2.1×10^5) mL/g] were obtained at very large CaCl_2 :U molar ratios [(1.5×10^3) – (2.1×10^4)]. Even with a tremendous excess of CaCl_2 (CaCl_2 :U molar ratio $\sim 6 \times 10^5$), the $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ still reveals a very good UO_2^{2+} removal efficiency (76%) and high K_d^U values [3.1×10^3 mL/g]. Such a preference of $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ for UO_2^{2+} in the presence of high Ca^{2+} concentrations indicates $\text{UO}_2^{2+} \cdots \text{S}^{2-}$ bonding interactions.

[0279] XRD patterns of the samples after adsorbed the Ca/U mixtures showed that at low Ca/U ratio of 1500, the basal spacing retained 0.80 nm of the starting material, while at high Ca/U ratios larger than 10000, a basal spacing of 0.78/0.77 nm appears, showing the intercalation of Cl^- into the LDH gallery. This is because of the stronger affinity of Cl^- anions with the LDH layer and the high concentration of Cl^- coming from CaCl_2 .

[0280] We also tested the performance of $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ in the presence of a large excess of Na^+ , since very high sodium concentrations are usually present in wastewater. An exceptional ability of $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ to absorb UO_2^{2+} quantitatively ($\geq 97\%$ U removal capacity) in the presence of a tremendous ($\geq 10^4$ -fold) excess of NaCl or NaNO_3 (Table 11) can be observed, and the K_d values for UO_2^{2+} are larger than 10^4 mL/g, both of which indicate the very high selectivity of $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ for UO_2^{2+} against Na^+ .

[0281] X-ray powder diffraction patterns after $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ adsorbed NaCl +U showed that following the adsorption of UO_2^{2+} , Cl^- anions also intercalated into the LDH gallery, forming Cl-LDH with the basal spacing of 0.77 nm, which was observable in CaCl_2 /U system.

[0282] We examined the applicability of $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ for remediation of water samples (Table 12) contaminated by concentrations of UO_2^{2+} ([U]~0.02-1 ppm). Initially, we examined the performance of $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ for decontamination of potable water solutions [V:m=100 mL/g] to which ppb levels of U (~20 ppb) were added. The removal of such low U levels was found to be $>75\%$.

[0283] The kinetics of this process was investigated. It can be seen (Table 13 and FIG. 6) that the sorption of UO_2^{2+} is very fast and the final U concentration becomes less than 1 ppb [well-below the acceptable limit of 30 ppb defined by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for uranium in potable water] with only 10 min treatment of the solution. For the contaminated seawater with 30 ppb U, the final concentration can be decreased to 7 ppb, with a % removal of 77%.

[0284] For the original seawater with a concentration of U ~9 ppb and very high concentrations of other ions such as Ca^{2+} (375 ppm), K^+ (396 ppm), Mg^{2+} (1063 ppm), Na^+ (9279 ppm), the final concentration of U can be decreased to <2 ppb. This suggests that $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ is also efficient for the treatment of contaminated seawater containing very low concentration of uranium.

TABLE 9

Equilibrium data for UO_2^{2+} using $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ as adsorbent.				
C_0 (ppm)	$C_{\text{f-24 h}}$ (ppm)	U capacity (mg/g)	Removal (%)	K_d (mL/g)
22.10	0.0065	22.09	99.97	3.4×10^6
48.70	0.12	48.57	99.75	3.9×10^5
76.40	2.66	73.74	96.52	2.8×10^4
121.43	9.41	112.02	92.25	1.2×10^4
242.43	100.76	141.67	58.44	1.4×10^4
301.45	141.31	160.14	53.12	1.1×10^4
345.21	161.50	183.71	53.22	1.1×10^4
547.87	343.08	204.79	37.38	6.0×10^2

contact time, ~24 h.

m: 0.030 g, V: 30 mL, V/m = 1000 mL/g.

TABLE 10

The results of $\text{S}_4\text{-LDH}$ adsorbed $\text{CaCl}_2/[\text{UO}_2]^{2+}$ mixtures at different Ca: UO_2^{2+} molar ratios of 1500-60000.						
Ca/U molar ratio	Ca		U			
	C_0 (ppm)	$C_{\text{f-3 d}}$ (ppm)	C_0 (ppm)	$C_{\text{f-24 h}}$ (ppm)	Removal (%)	K_d (mL/g)
1483	928	963	3.72	0.017	99.5	2.1×10^5
4856	1940	1988	2.38	0.056	97.6	4.1×10^4

TABLE 10-continued

The results of S ₄ -LDH adsorbed CaCl ₂ /[UO ₂] ²⁺ mixtures at different Ca:UO ₂ ²⁺ molar ratios of 1500-60000.						
Ca/U	Ca		U			
	C ₀	C _f -3 d	C ₀	C _f -24 h	Removal	K _d (ml/g)
molar ratio	(ppm)	(ppm)	(ppm)	(ppm)	(%)	
12797	3864	3296	1.80	0.081	95.5	2.1 × 10 ⁴
21574	6748	6608	1.86	0.051	97.3	3.5 × 10 ⁴
58828	12779	13167	1.29	0.314	75.7	3.1 × 10 ³

contact time, ~24 h.

m: 0.030 g,

V: 30 mL,

V/m = 1000 mL/g.

TABLE 11

Uranium adsorption results of S ₄ -LDH for Na/U mixed ions.					
0.47M NaCl + UO ₂ ²⁺ (Na/UO ₂ ²⁺ molar ratio ≈ 40000)					
ions	C ₀ (ppm)	C _f -3 d (ppm)	ion capacity (mg/g)	Removal (%)	K _d (ml/g)
Na ⁺	10734	10682	—	—	—
UO ₂ ²⁺	2.73	0.081	2.65	97.0	3.3 × 10 ⁴
0.20M NaNO ₃ + U (Na/U molar ratio ≈ 20000)					
	C ₀ (ppm)	C _f -3 d (ppm)	ion capacity (mg/g)	Removal (%)	K _d
Na ⁺	4428	4401	—	—	—
U	2.36	0.02	2.34	99.2	1.2 × 10 ⁵

contact time, 3 d maximum.

m: 0.030 g, V: 30 mL, V/m = 1000 mL/g.

TABLE 12

Adsorption results of S ₄ -LDH for contaminated potable water, contaminated seawater and original seawater.				
	other ions	U concentration (ppm)		
		Initial	final	% removal
Contaminated potable water	Ca ²⁺ (73.8 ppm), K ⁺ (4.38 ppm), Mg ²⁺ (23.6 ppm), Na ⁺ (21.2 ppm)	0.020	0.005	75.00
Contaminated seawater	Ca ²⁺ (359 ppm), K ⁺ (374 ppm), Mg ²⁺ (1020 ppm), Na ⁺ (8981 ppm)	0.030	0.007	76.67
Original seawater	Ca ²⁺ (375 ppm), K ⁺ (396 ppm), Mg ²⁺ (1063 ppm), Na ⁺ (9279 ppm)	0.009	0.002	77.78

contact time, 24 h.

m: 0.015 g, V: 15 mL, V/m = 1000 mL/g.

TABLE 13

The kinetics data of UO ₂ ²⁺ adsorption of S ₄ -LDH for water solutions with initial U concentration of 7 ppb.				
C ₀ (ppb)	t (min)	C _f (ppb)	Removal (%)	K _d (ml/g)
6.82	10	0.85	87.6	7.0 × 10 ²
	30	0.46	93.3	1.4 × 10 ³
	60	0.45	93.5	1.4 × 10 ³
	120	0.36	94.8	1.8 × 10 ³
	180	0.31	95.5	2.1 × 10 ³

m: 0.25 g, V: 25 mL, V/m = 100 mL/g.

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[0309] The materials devices and methods described herein may be embodied in many different forms and should not be construed as limited to the embodiments set forth herein. These embodiments are provided in sufficient written detail to describe and enable one of ordinary skill in the art to make and utilize the invention as defined by the claims and equivalents thereof.

[0310] Likewise, many modifications and other embodiments of the devices and methods disclosed herein will come to mind to one of skill in the art to which the inventions pertain having benefit of the teachings presented in the foregoing descriptions and associated drawings. Therefore, it is to be understood that the inventions disclosed herein are not to be limited to the specific embodiments disclosed and that modifications and other embodiments are intended to be included within the scope of the appended claims. Although specific terms are disclosed herein, they are used in a generic and descriptive sense only and not for purposes of limitation.

[0311] Unless defined otherwise, all technical and scientific terms used herein have the same meaning as commonly understood by one of skill in the art to which the invention pertains. Although any methods and materials similar to or equivalent to those described herein can be used in the practice or testing of the present invention, the preferred methods and materials are described herein.

[0312] Terms used herein are intended as “open” terms (for example, the term “including” should be interpreted as “including but not limited to,” the term “having” should be interpreted as “having at least,” the term “includes” should be interpreted as “includes but is not limited to,” etc.).

[0313] Furthermore, in those instances where a convention analogous to “at least one of A, B and C, etc.” is used, in general such a construction is intended in the sense of one having ordinary skill in the art would understand the convention (for example, “a system having at least one of A, B and C” would include but not be limited to systems that have A alone, B alone, C alone, A and B together, A and C together, B and C together, and/or A, B, and C together). It will be further understood by those within the art that virtually any disjunctive word and/or phrase presenting two or more alternative terms, whether in the description or figures, should be understood to contemplate the possibilities of including one of the terms, either of the terms, or both terms. For example, the phrase “A or B” will be understood to include the possibilities of “A” or “B” or “A and B.”

[0314] All language such as “from,” “to,” “up to,” “at least,” “greater than,” “less than,” and the like, include the number recited and refer to ranges which can subsequently be broken down into sub-ranges as discussed above.

[0315] A range includes each individual member. Thus, for example, a group having 1-3 members refers to groups having 1, 2, or 3 members. Similarly, a group having 6 members refers to groups having 1, 2, 3, 4, or 6 members, and so forth.

[0316] The modal verb “may” refers to the preferred use or selection of one or more options or choices among the several described embodiments or features contained within the same. Where no options or choices are disclosed regarding a

particular embodiment or feature contained in the same, the modal verb “may” refers to an affirmative act regarding how to make or use and aspect of a described embodiment or feature contained in the same, or a definitive decision to use a specific skill regarding a described embodiment or feature contained in the same. In this latter context, the modal verb “may” has the same meaning and connotation as the auxiliary verb “can.”

[0317] As used herein, the articles “a” and “an” refer to one or to more than one (for example, to at least one) of the grammatical object of the article.

[0318] “About” and “approximately” shall generally mean an acceptable degree of error for the quantity measured given the nature or precision of the measurements. Exemplary degrees of error are within 20-25 percent (%), typically, within 10%, and more typically, within 5% of a given value or range of values.

What is claimed is:

1. A polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxide comprising:

a layered double hydroxide comprising a plurality of positively charged host layers comprising mixed metal hydroxides, wherein the host layers are separated by interlayer spaces; and

polysulfide anions intercalated in the interlayer spaces.

2. The layered double hydroxide of claim 1, wherein the layered double hydroxide is a magnesium-aluminum layered double hydroxide.

3. The layered double hydroxide of claim 2, wherein the polysulfide anions have the formula $[S_x]^{2-}$, where $x=2, 4$ or 5 .

4. The layered double hydroxide of claim 1, wherein the polysulfide anions have the formula $[S_x]^{2-}$, where $x=2, 4$ or 5 .

5. A method of removing metal from a sample comprising the metal, the method comprising:

exposing the polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxide of claim 1 to the sample, wherein the metal reacts with the polysulfide anions to form compounds comprising metal-sulfur bonds in the interlayer spaces; and

removing the polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxide and the compounds from the sample.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the sample comprises vaporized Hg which reacts with the polysulfide anions to form HgS.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein the polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxide has a Hg capture capacity of at least about 5×10^5 $\mu\text{g/g}$, as measured by inductively coupled plasma.

8. The method of claim 5, wherein the sample comprises metal ions which react with the polysulfide anions to form MS_x compounds, where x is an integer in the range from 1 to 8.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein at least 40% by weight of the metal ions are removed from the sample.

10. The method of claim 8, wherein at least 70% by weight of the metal ions are removed from the sample.

11. The method of claim 8, wherein the metal ions are Hg^{2+} ions, Ag^+ ions, Cu^{2+} ions or a combination thereof.

12. The method of claim 8, wherein the metal ions are Hg^{2+} ions and the polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxide has a metal ion absorptive capacity of at least 6×10^5 $\mu\text{g/g}$.

13. The method of claim 5, wherein the sample comprises uranium-containing ions which react with the polysulfide anions to form compounds having U—S bonds.

14. The method of claim **13**, wherein the uranium-containing ions are uranyl cations.

15. The method of claim **13**, wherein the sample comprises sea water.

16. The method of claim **13**, wherein the sample comprises waste water.

17. The method of claim **16**, wherein the waste water is from a nuclear power plant.

18. A method of making a polysulfide intercalated layered double hydroxide from a layered double hydroxide comprising: a plurality of positively charged host layers comprising mixed metal hydroxides, wherein the host layers are separated by interlayer spaces; and charge-balancing anions within the interlayer spaces, the method comprising: exposing the layered double hydroxide to a solution comprising polysulfide anions, wherein the polysulfide anions undergo anion exchange with the charge-balancing anions in the interlayer spaces.

* * * * *